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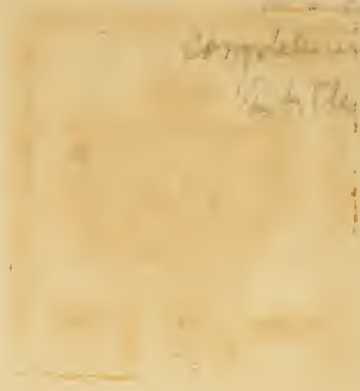
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THE
EXCLUSIVES.

VOL. I.

Duchesse de Sagan.

THE
EXCLUSIVES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE EXCLUSIVES:



CHAPTER I.

THE BOUDOIR.

THE boudoir of a woman of fashion exhibits in its history, if faithfully recorded, a picture of the manners, modes, and morals of the times; and, however little such things in themselves might deserve to be handed down, or registered as objects of imitation, yet to chronicle them for the day would not be without its use. The sensible part of mankind would laugh at the follies, and wonder at the extravagance, which the page of such ephemeral history unfolded; while the actors in the scene might possibly view in the

mirror held up to them their own lives, and their own actions, in a new and truer light.

Lady Tilney's boudoir,—the boudoir *par excellence*,—was not in fact a boudoir, according to the old legitimate meaning of the word. Indeed, Lady Tilney herself, the presiding deity of the sanctuary, professed her contempt of legitimacy in boudoirs, as well as in sovereigns; at least she did so in words, though, like many other professors, her words and actions frequently contradicted each other; and it may be questioned if there are any greater despots, than those who inveigh most against despotism.

But to return from this digression to the boudoir. Lady Tilney's boudoir was destined to the reception of far other votaries than those of the old *rabattu* god of love. No: her boudoir was visited by persons of a very different character from those who were formerly the frequenters of such a scene. Authors, poets, political intriguers, artists, and committees for the management of the state of society, formed the chief personages

among those who figured there, and their business was of a very different complexion from that of the supposed use, or original meaning ascribed to a boudoir.

In the former, of old, the painted harpsichord, the huge cabinet, the gigantic chimney-piece, the tapestried wall, were suited to the silken garb, and bag and sword, that formed the attire of the male part of its visitants; as well as to the hoop and fly-cap of the ladies who presided there. In this modern temple of idolatry, only a few of the ancient decorations were allowed a place, such as the marquetry cabinet, the *or-moulu* clock, or vase of China; but for the rest, what a change!

Volumes of worth, and works of merit and deep learning, were now covered by the novels of the day, or hidden by trivial elegancies newly imported from Paris; while on the walls, the rare productions of Titian or Vandyck were intermingled with some chalky portrait of the modern school, tricked out in the millinery gear of the fashion of the day. Scattered on the tables, however, there was a

redeeming feature in the character of the decorative objects which met the eye, for there lay some richly chased gold ornaments, the works of Benvenuto Cellini, or some one not less skilful, though it may be of forgotten name ; and while these ornamented the apartment, they served the double purpose of affording Lady Tilney an opportunity, not only to discourse on their beauty, but to enter into all the particulars of Cellini's strange life.

Add to this description of the boudoir and its visitants, the occasional presence of Lady Tilney's beautiful children, and its portraiture is closed ; but not so the genius and history of all the transactions, councils, and cabals which took place there. These will be best understood, by passing from the boudoir to Lady Tilney's own character and pursuits ; if to describe these by any means were indeed possible : but it would be an endless, hopeless task, to enumerate all that Lady Tilney did, or fancied *she did*—still more what she said ; for to do her justice, her's was no vapid exis-

tence of the mere routine of a London lady's life.

No—indolence was not the besetting sin, insipidity was not the vice of her *morale* or her *physique*. But as to enumerating severally the subjects which employed her care, and the various branches of these subjects into which she diverged, that indeed would be difficult. Her life and occupations may, perhaps, be best delineated by representing them as one vast bazar of interests, all equally claiming her attention—"the court, the camp, the senate, and the field:" certainly the field of Newmarket, where it is said she regulated her husband's calculations and interests with great success.

These objects, and many more than these, which, as the charlatans say at the end of their lists, are too tedious to mention, filled up the life of this laborious and distinguished lady. Nor were her labours less onerous in managing the government of the society of *ton*. Her rule was there despotic—her word was law;—and if some few persons pretended to

step aside, not following the fashionable multitude in bowing the knee to Baal, or ventured to think for themselves in the circle in which she moved, immediately, as though by an enchanter's wand, they were banished thence, and some more amalgamating spirit was chosen to fill up the vacancy. There was a kind of air-gun fired, which was sure to hit the mark, without betraying the hand that drew the trigger: a sort of *lettre-de-cachet*, as effectual as those promulgated in the times of Louis le Grand, which consigned to oblivion the offending persons, while the victims themselves could not fathom any cause or assign any particular reason for the sentence.

Nevertheless, in the very midst of this ruling and reigning, this despotic sway in the court of *ton*, a secret dissatisfaction existed in the breast of Lady Tilney. She, indeed, was one of those haughty liberals who affect to despise kings and courts; not because they dislike those necessary evils, as they call them, but because they are themselves, or would be if they could, the greatest of all sovereigns.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the high ground of rank and situation on which she stood, it rankled at her heart to have offended her sovereign, and to feel herself an object of just dislike to him ; for, however great the magnanimity shewn to her on the occasion of her offence, still to be aware that, under circumstances, she could no longer be considered a favourite at court, was in itself a source of the deepest mortification. Impressed with this consciousness, what was to be done ? Why, render all courts the subject of flippant raillery ; vote them and their sovereigns old-fashioned bores ; erect herself into a queen, and have a court of her own. In truth, this plan agreed better with her self-love than any other ; because sovereigns and courts, in as far as regards the outward decorum of forms, regulate and keep society in its proper course ; whereas, under the sham dynasty of *ton*, caprice bears rule, and tyranny in its worst sense marks the conduct of those who sit on its ephemeral throne.

Connected with this system, the pride of ancestry too was necessarily another subject of ridicule with Lady Tilney, who thought that those who, on such grounds, pretended to take any lead in the world of fashion, had much better retire to their castles, and there indulge in dreams of their greatness.

Nor did Lady Tilney's thirst for power end with her effort for universal dominion in matters of *ton*—she had another ambition, that of leading and controlling the political party to which she had attached herself. Here, however, her sway was more imaginary than real; and often the long-headed politician, or crafty diplomate, as they listened with apparent complacency to her advice, allowed her words to fall unheeded on their ear, or laughed at her in secret. With the young and uninformed aspirants in the career of political life, Lady Tilney had, perhaps, more success; and many a rising scion of a noble house has been known to adopt, under the influence of her smiles, and from a foolish vanity of being noticed by

her, a line of conduct quite at variance with the wishes of their parents, and to the sacrifice of their own best interests.

In this grasp at power, however successfully achieved, Lady Tilney felt herself ill at ease—her mind was continually harassed by reflections on the tottering and uncertain tenure of *ton*, and the possibility, nay, probability, of some younger, newer person, climbing to the envied seat which she then possessed. The fear of a certain Duchess of Hermanton was constantly before her imagination, as the embodied object of her alarm; and she considered it as a measure little short of self-preservation, to secure her influence, if possible, on a still firmer basis, by some decided act, or the invention of some fresh folly. As to Almack's, that circle of exclusiveness had been polluted; its brief course was run, and its brightness on the decline.

The more Lady Tilney reflected on the subject, the more she became convinced of the expediency of her intentions; and determined, therefore, to mature her plan immediately.

Having despatched her notes to the Comtesse Leinsengen, Lady Tenderden, and Lady Ellersby, she commanded that no one should be admitted to her presence but themselves.

“ Yet stay, Destouches,” she added to the page, as she issued her orders ; “ Prince Luttermanne by all means, should he call.” And then, having given audience to three cooks, four painters, two authors, an authoress, and several milliners, she finished with advice to a poet and a critique upon his work.

Lady Tilney, before the arrival of the personages she had written to (for Lady Tilney knew the value of intervals), arranged her list of engagements; tossing some into the fire—with the velocity of one well practised in the weight, measure, and value of names; and examining others of more importance. She determined to mar all that might interfere with her own views in society.—“ Mrs. Annesly, truly what a griffin ! and the Countess of Delamere, and Lady Melcombe !—but the Marchioness of Borrowdale ! that indeed requires attention.” Lady Tilney rang the bell—Destouches ap-

peared in a minute—the peculiar hasty touch of call was known to the well-appointed page. “Send Arquimbeaud here!” and the distinguished Arquimbeaud soon obeyed the summons. “I have determined to have a party, Arquimbeaud, next Thursday; see that cards are issued for that day, according to this list.”

As he withdrew, Comtesse Leinsengen was announced. The immense bonnet and deep veil—the splendid cashmere and still long petticoats (although they were generally worn very much shortened), afforded a favourable costume to the lady who now advanced; certain defects were thus concealed, and imagination might lend that delicacy of slimness and form to the feet and ankles which pervaded the rest of the person, but which did not characterize those of the Comtesse.

The rapid volubility of the one lady, and the sharp short sentences of the other, began the conference. Lady Tilney placed the most luxurious of all the luxurious chairs close to the fire, pushed forward the screen, and with the eagerness of apparent friendship, seemed

to wish to make her visitor quite at home: or, as she expressed it, “deliciously comfortable.” “You have learned that word now, dear Comtesse,—indeed you have adopted it; and there is no one who understands the thing so perfectly as yourself.”

Midst all these courtesies and courtings the Comtesse observed a sort of abstracted air, though they were (and so far Lady Tilney was sincere) things of course.

“My dear Comtesse, I am so glad we have a minute alone, to discuss our plans. I have many things of consequence to say to you; but before I begin I must speak to you of that horrible affair of poor Lady Mailing’s; it is quite impossible to support her any longer, for you are aware her secret is publicly known. So long as she was prudent, and observed appearances, it was all very well; but *now* it will be impossible for me to receive her. You know I never did receive any body who placed themselves in a similar situation—not even my own relations; my character has always been *intacte*, and I cannot *compromète* myself, though I

am very sorry for poor Lady Mailing; and had she only avoided this *esclandre*, and managed her affair prudently, I would have stood by her to the end; but as it is—”

“Oh, certainly not,” interrupted the Comtesse; “you must be conscious that every one knows Lady Tilney’s high reputation, and it would never be supposed dat you would countenance a belle passion; vraitment, quand on est tellement dupe as to sacrifice sa position dans le monde, to a man’s vanity, or to be playing de sentimentale at forty, it is quite enough to make one sick, and she well deserves to be vat you call blown. *Mais, de grâce*, do not let us prose more about her—*vat sinifies?*”

“Oh, very true,” and then there are other matters of so much greater consequence to consider. Do you really think that this administration will hold—you who are in all the secrets?—positively you must tell me. I am sure if that man (lowering her voice to a whisper) is at the head of affairs, all must go wrong—poor England! what will become of you? But we will never allow that—shall we?’

“ Oh ! trève de politiques, ma chere, si vous m'aimez ; it is a subject quite marital, and therefore, you know, not at all in my way. What I want to revolutionize, or rather to reform, is your state of society.”

“ Precisely, my dear Comtesse, it is the very subject on which I wished to talk to you, when I wrote requesting to see you—you received my note, did you not?”

“ Oh, yes; but it is an affair on which we hold such very different opinions. My maxim is, *se bien amuser d'après sa propre volonté*—that is what I want to do; and to tell you the truth, I am ennuyé à la mort in your London world—every thing is so stupid here! *Vat* signify dat tiresome Almack, after all? It was good enough at first, when it put people in a passion, *et pendant que se faisoit fureur*; but now that, somehow or oder, you liberales admitted every petite demoiselle vid her red elbows, and vulgar mama to take care of her, it has lost all its character, and I positively intend to withdraw my name. Besides, de lady patronesses cannot even maintain a seat at de

top of de room—de oder night I find Lady Melcombe and her daughter perch up in my seat; and though I walked over them and stared them down, dey positively took no hint, but sat still so cōmfortably vulgar it was quite provoking. No, no, my dear, Almack's day is finish and de thing must fall—so never stay by a falling friend; when a person or a ting begins to totter, leave it.”

“ Very true,” rejoined Lady Tilney; “ there is much truth in what you advise (and she looked very grave). But then, you know, my dear Comtesse, you must consider the independence of our constitution—which makes it very difficult—”

“ Not to have a stupid society. – Agreed.”

“ But the great number of our nobility,” rejoined Lady Tilney, “ and the weight and consequence of a still greater number of influential members in the other house ”——

“ Renders all your pretences of a société choisie mere pretence.”

“ Pardon me, Comtesse, you have yourself owned that my parties are select; and you

yourself, although in a public situation, contrive to leave out those who do not suit your purpose. After all, what can tend more to the preservation of society?—than such impertinence” was on Lady Tilney’s tongue; but she checked herself, and added with a little cough that gave time for reflexion: “What can tend more to the maintenance of a société distinguée than the exercise of this choice, made without reference to the rank or situation of the parties, but merely dependent on the voice of the few who are formed to lead?”

“Very true,” rejoined the Comtesse Leinsengen, “and if that system was properly upheld, it is the only chance of not being *obsédé* by vulgars;—but you do not act upon it sufficiently. As to myself, I can no long bear de whole ting; my health does not permit of your late hours, and I generally go away when your company are beginning to arrive. And then these great routs of your Duchess d’Hermantons and your Ladi Borrowdales and Aveling, sont à dormir de bout.”

“Agreed, my dear Comtesse, I do so agree

with you; it is the very matter I am longing to discuss with you. Do let us settle something amongst ourselves, that shall rid us of all these evils, and establish a *société à part*. I must tell you what I have already done to effect this purpose. You know that odious Lady Borrowdale has one of her everlasting At Homes next Thursday, to meet their Royal Highnesses the —— as usual, that vulgar decoy; so I have therefore countermanded my former invitations, and issued my cards for that very day—Nobody will go there, will they?”

“ Perhaps not many; and if some do, there are plenty left.”

“ Yes,” said Lady Tilney, with ill-concealed anxiety, “ but you know the royalties always do accept her invitations.”

“ What matters dat—you do not care for royalties.” For an instant Lady Tilney’s command of language was checked—she almost betrayed her vexation, when fortunately the name of Lady Ellersby was announced, whose dawdling drawl, as she entered the apartment, smoothed over the asperities which began to

mark the conversation, and which might have rendered it in the end a little too *piquante*.

“ My dear Lady Ellersby,” said Lady Tilney, “ how charmed I am to see you. I was dying to meet you, to consult you, to enjoy your entertaining society.” The Comtesse Leinsengen smiled significantly, as she said, “ And so was I.”

“ Consult me ! La—well, that is something quite new—nobody ever consulted me ; but pray explain what you mean.”

“ Oh ! we want to establish some regulations by which our society shall be distinguished, and which shall save us from the inroads of all these people whom we are constantly meeting, and obliged to be civil to, whether we will or no—in short, something that shall make us, as we ought to be—a *race à part*.”

“ I thought,” Lady Ellersby replied, “ we always were that.”—“ To be sure we were ; but then, my dear, you know abuses will creep in, and all constitutions require from time to time to be strengthened or reformed, according to

circumstances; and you know, my dear Lady Ellersby, that we have all of us long since lamented that Almack's, which was excellent in its way, has now, from the infringement on its privileges, become quite corrupted from its original design, and something positively must be done, or we shall be overwhelmed *en masse*—something to stem this torrent, this inroad of Goths and Vandals.”

“Dear me, that sounds very alarming—you quite frighten me; I don't understand you—pray tell me what it is you propose.”

“Why,” answered Lady Tilney, “we wish to form a society entirely to ourselves, which shall be quite exclusive—a society for which we shall settle *d'avance* every particular and qualification of the persons who may be admitted to it. Thus you see (turning to the Comtesse Leinsengen), my dear Comtesse, we shall never do any thing but in concert with each other, and never invite any one but those who entirely suit us. You understand me now, don't you?” addressing Lady Ellersby.

“Oh dear, yes! I think I do.”

“ No, no, you do not understand her. Permettez—in one word I will explain vat Lady Tilney mean to say : voici le mot de l’énigme—you are all English, and though you do your *possible* you cannot help being English. You are all afraid in dis country to do vat you like best ; and though Lady Tilney propose to ask only de chosen few, you will none of you do so in reality, take my word for dat. You talk freedom, but act in chains. Now we, au contraire, *chez nous*—we women I mean—do de freedom, and never tink of de chain at all ; but whenever you ladies make your lists for your parties for instance ; den comes—dis is not politic, *toder* is not right,—dis is not my husband’s pleasure ; some scarecrow or anoder is always driving you off de land of amusement. Now you say you will open your doors only to those you like, and you are right—dere is no oder secret for to make pleasant society ; but you will *not* do it nevertheless, ladies, for you are all de cowards.”

“ Indeed, my dear Comtesse,” rejoined Lady Tilney, “ you will find that we *shall*, though—

and I think effectually; although there are certain principles in our constitution which extend to the ruling even of private life—and these the wives of certain nobles cannot wholly overlook.” Comtesse Leinsengen shrugged her shoulders.

“ Ah, dear, it is as I thought, you are de woman I like best in dis country; but you are all over shackle, up to de ear in de *qu'en dira t'on!* De plebe ought to be made of de noble's opinion, not de noble constrained to dat of de vulgar.”

“ That may do very well with you,” rejoined Lady Tilney, “ but with us as an unqualified maxim it will never do. I grant, Comtesse, all that you say can be done in one's own house, where one makes one's own laws and rules in one's own way: so far it is only asserting one's own right to liberty, and as far as we can persuade people to be of the same way of thinking it is all right. But I have too much liberty in my heart to desire to tyrannize as you suggest; and, in fine, confess myself too

much of an Englishwoman to wish to see your system prevailing amongst us."

Lady Tilney said this in a tone of English pride, which proved that she had not forgotten all that was best worth remembering, although it was in contradiction to the spirit of what had fallen from her a moment before.

Lady Tilney, however, dealt largely in contradiction at all times. The Countess Ellersby smiled; the Comtesse Leinsengen again shrugged her shoulders, drew her shawl around her, and was preparing to depart, saying, "Well! mes chères dames, I leave you to the enjoyment of your liberty, and have done."

"But I have not done," said Lady Tilney; "I am determined we shall have a society that shall be quite our own, and yet not subversive of principles we must uphold. (Another shrug of the shoulders.) Allow me to say, that if you, Comtesse, and you, my dear Lady Ellersby, will but second me, I am sure we shall not fail, and I know I may reckon on

Prince Luttermanne co-operating with us;—so far so good.”

“And Princesse Luttermanne?” inquired Lady Ellersby.

“Oh, for the prince’s sake we must have her,” replied the Comtesse Leinsengen, “D’ailleurs, *dans ma position*, it could not be otherwise—in all cases we must pass over des inconveniens—besides she is good-humoured, and has *her own fry to fish*, and will not trouble us much.”

Lady Ellersby and Lady Tilney looked at each other, and laughed. “And then,” observed Lady Tilney, “we have Princesse de la Grange, and Mrs. Kirchoffer; we must enrol them on our list (although they are sufficiently insipid), because they can be useful, and dare not act but in subserviency to *us*. But, Lady Boileau, what shall we do with her? She indeed has a will of her own, and she has a mother very much *de trop*, whom however she treats cavalierly enough (of which, by the way, I do not approve); but, notwithstanding, I

think we must have her, though we can by no means be troubled with the mama."

"Certainment pas," cried the Comtesse, "for the Irish mama with her vulgar repartee would give a mauvaise tournure to de whole society."

"There you are right; and while we admit the daughter, remember, it is only on sufferance, just on the same footing as we admit Mrs. Kirchoffer, and as I propose that we should also do Lady de Chere and Lady Hamlet Vernon, and——"

"Mais, que faire de la jeune lady," interrupted the Comtesse, "qui parmi un certain set is a good deal de vogue, Ladi—Ladi,—vat you name her?"

"What, Lady Baskerville?" asked Lady Tilney; and then replied, "Oh she must be one of us, to be sure, for I think we can make use of her—she only longs to be in the fashion, and her husband also. Flatter their vanity, and you do with them what you chuse; make them believe they are of the *ton*, and you have them at command."

“ Well, den, now you have named all de ladies I suppose, and dere is but one cavalier; do you mean us to be a convent, and have no gentlemen?”

“ By no means, my dear Comtesse; of course there will be all our husbands.” Here the Comtesse Leinsengen had recourse to her usual expressive gesture of contempt. “ And then,” proceeded Lady Tilney, “ there is the Duke of Mercington, Lord Raynham, Lord Tonnerre, Lesly Winyard, and Frank Ombre,—Spencer Newcombe,—and we must not forget Lord Glenmore; though I wish he were more decided in his political creed. Besides we cannot omit Lord Albert D’Es-terre, whom we must have on probation, for he is young and only just returned from the Continent; but they say he is very clever, and I think may in time become one of us. But, ere we decide further on the gentlemen, we must consult Prince Luttermanne.”

“ Ah! bon chere ladi” (with a nod of approval). “ Quite so,” added Lady Ellersby,

languidly; “for, though he is called good-humoured, he can be as cross as is necessary. I never saw any body *walk over people* better than he does.”

Lady Tilney, who had been for the last minute or two busily employed with her pen setting down the names which she had just mentioned, interrupted Lady Ellersby, saying, “By the bye, there is one rule very necessary to be observed, which I am sure we shall all agree in; that is, to admit no unmarried ladies, unless something very particular indeed should make us waive our resolve. When I say this, I do not, of course, mean to *balls*; but I mean to those coteries which will in fact constitute the *élite* of our society. And then I propose that we none of us go to the old-established dullifications; but, on their nights, each one of us must in turn take care to chuse that same evening for our coteries.”

“Dat vill do very well for de Lady Borrowdale, and de Lady Aveling, and dat old Marchioness—vat you call her—Feuille morte; but

La Duchesse d'Hermanton, vat vill you do vid her? it is not so easy to *take dat lionne par la barbe.*"

"Oh," rejoined Lady Tilney, for this was a name she feared to offend, "the Duchess is not one of us, it is true; but we need only walk once a year through her apartments; and we can bear that—besides, she is a sort of person" (apart)—and Lady Tilney broke off abruptly from a subject, in itself always disagreeable to her.

"And now," she went on to say, "having formed the outline of our plan, we have only to follow it up, and I am sure it will be successful. I wonder Prince Luttermanne and Lady Tenderden are not come, for I wrote to them both; and I should have liked that we talked the matter over altogether. However, I cannot doubt but they will agree with us in our arrangements; and if you, dear Comtesse, and you Lady Ellersby, will see Princesse de la Grange and Mrs. Kirchoffer, and Lady Baskerville, I will take care to speak to the other

parties. Of course I shall see Prince Luttermanne some time or other this day, and Lady Tenderden, for they must have received my notes; and I will settle with him about our gentlemen." Then addressing the Comtesse, she added, "I need not, I am sure, remind you, who are so discreet, that the success of every thing which is to produce *éclat* depends upon the secret combination of the movements; and therefore, in speaking to the different parties, pray impress on their minds the absolute necessity of privacy, and not to let our designs be known beforehand by a premature publication of them, but rather let them be developed by their effect; and when their existence will have been confirmed beyond the possibility of counteraction.

"Assurement *laissez moi faire.*"—And here Lady Ellersby, looking at her watch, started from her chair, saying, "Dear me! I had no notion it was so late. I had an appointment with my Lord, and it is past the time. Bless me! what shall I do?" Then making her

adieu, with more vivacity than was her custom, she departed in greater haste than she was ever known to do before.

“Who *is her* Milord just now?” asked Comtesse Leinsengen.

“Oh fie! malicieuse,” replied Lady Tilney.

“Is it again dat little consequential personage who looks like a perdrix santé aux truffes? I fancy I saw something like a réchauffé getting up between them de oder night at Lady De Chere’s.”

“Now really, my dear Comtesse, I must defend my friend. People are always so ill-natured—one must have some cavalier, you know, to walk about with in public—and scandal always ascribes evil where none exists. No, no; Lady Ellersby has too charming a husband for this to gain credit for a moment.” The Comtesse’s usual shrug implied *comme vous voulez*, and she added, “it is truly extraordinary how any body can call dat ladi handsome, vid her drawn mouth and peevish expression!”

“Surely she has a sweet smile?”—“When it is not a bitter one,” rejoined the Comtesse; “but

what *sinifies?* she does very well for what she is good for. Now I must go, and you must be de active agent in settling our Lady Parliament ; as for me, I will have a sinecure post."

" You are quite delightful, Comtesse, and ought to have every thing your own way ; so good bye, if you *must* go. I will remember to see Prince Luttermanne ; I will not let the matter rest — adieu," and they kissed each other's cheeks on both sides, " adieu !" — " You will not let de matter rest — no, I am sure you will not — nor any oder ting or person," thought the Comtesse, as she glided out of the room. " How frightfully red her nose is become," observed Lady Tilney, soliloquizing, as she looked at her own smooth cream-coloured skin in the glass.

CHAPTER II.

CHARACTERISTICS.

OF Lady Tilney's character a hasty outline has been attempted in the preceding chapter; falling short, however, as it is confessed every attempt must do, to delineate all its varied features. Something, however, may have been gathered, by viewing her in the midst of the group assembled in her boudoir; and the portraiture will be rendered still more distinct, as the character of her associates are further developed.

Of Lady Tilney herself it may be said, that that real or pretended contempt of rank which she affected to entertain, arose from the circumstances of her own parentage, which, on her mother's side at least, was not noble; to the same cause, also, may perhaps be attributed her anxious irritability, ill concealed under a forced gaiety, lest the respect and homage which she considered to be her due, should not

be paid her. There was a restlessness in her assumed tranquillity, wholly unlike the easy natural languor of her friend Lady Ellersby, to which she would gladly have attained, and which it was always the object of her ambition to imitate; but she never reached that perfectibility of *insouciance*, which marks a superiority of birth and station.

Notwithstanding the part which she consequently was obliged to play, there was still a good deal of nature in her composition; much more than in that of the person whose demeanour she envied;—and had not her character been influenced by a life of dissipation, she seemed designed to have passed through existence diffusing usefulness and cheerfulness around her. Much might be said in extenuation of Lady Tilney's faults and follies, courted and caressed as she was; as indeed there is ever much indulgence to be extended to all who, in situations of power and of temptation (however many their foibles) remain free from positive vice. The voice of censure should be guarded therefore in its condemnation; remembering

that the inability to do wrong, or the want of allurements to yield to it, are often the sole preservatives against similar errors.

In commenting upon such characters as Lady Tilney's, it is not for the purpose therefore of attaching blame to the defects of the individual, so much as to point out the dangers attendant on their peculiar stations, and to shew how far even noble natures are liable to be debased by constant exposure to a baneful influence. Were not this the object of a writer, idle and contemptible indeed would be the pen, which could waste its powers in tracing the vanities and follies of a race which always has existed in some shape or other, and possibly will always continue to do so.

There is an indulgence of spleen, a silly gossiping espionage, which delights in prying into the faults of others, without any motive but that of the gratification of its own mean nature—but there is an investigation into the habits and manners of the actors in the scene of fashionable folly, which, by dispelling the illusion, may preserve others from being heed-

lessly drawn into the vortex of so dangerous a career. A sermon would not, could not, descend from its sacred dignity, to effect this—a philosophical or moral discourse, would have as little chance of working such an end;—but a narrative of actual occurrences may perhaps give warning of a peril, which is the greater because it bears outwardly, and on a cursory view, no appearance of future evil; for to the young, and indeed to all, there is a charm, and a very great charm too, in being something superior, something that others are not, or cannot be. No one acquainted with human nature will ever contradict this. The question of vital importance to be asked is—In what ought this distinction to consist? and what will really give it? Certainly *not* a life of dissipation, in which the affectation of new modes and manners constitute the business of existence; certainly *not* the sacrifice of moral and religious duty, to a courting of frivolous homage and the pursuit of an empty *éclat*.

These, however, it is to be feared, are more

generally the spurious objects of ambition with persons in fashionable life, than the solid advantages, and lasting fame, which their situations afford them the means of securing. And if it is thus with the world of fashion in general, how much more was it the case in the circle in which Lady Tilney reigned! Herself and her friends had no thought that tended to any specific moral purpose, in the strict sense of the word. The duties that were performed, were such only in a negative sense; they went to church, they lived with their husbands; some of them, but not all, had escaped scandal; they were fond mothers, at least in the eye of *their* world; they were alive to their offsprings' interests, at least their worldly interests; and beyond this, it is to be feared, neither for them, or for themselves, did their views extend.

Here may be closed the catalogue of their moral possessions. Of their outward shew of manner and courtesy, where so much in a *soi-disant* empire of ton might be expected, perhaps, there was still less to praise: a *brusquerie*

of address took place of polished breeding, where intimacy permitted any address at all; and where none was allowable, an insolent carelessness marked the behaviour, instead of that polite courtesy which is ever the distinguishing mark of really good manners.

Lady Tilney, had she not stood on the 'vantage ground of *ton*, might have been called vulgar: the loud and incessant talking, the abrupt and supercilious glance and motion, had it not been backed by title and an assumed superiority, would have been designated by a very different name from that under which her manners passed current; and even as it was, they sometimes received a reproof which, however affectedly scorned, was deeply felt. An instance of this occurred on the occasion of her receiving the homage of a distinguished foreigner; when, in the intoxication of the moment's vanity, Lady Tilney forgot the respect due to one of exalted station, rudely turning her back, and brushing past him in the dance, a disregard of etiquette which he whose manners are all elegance and condes-

ension, would never in his station have shewn to the meanest of his subjects, and whose sense of delicacy and propriety is so acute, that wherever female manners are concerned, none could better know how to condemn whatever derogated in the slightest degree from them.

It was to the displeasure incurred by this circumstance, and to the loss of favour which all who have ever lived in its sunshine cannot fail to lament when withdrawn, that allusion was made, in speaking of Lady Tilney's contempt of sovereigns and courts. Here was to be found one bad effect of a system which, while false in every sense, arrogated to itself perfection in all.

There was no immorality to rebuke in this instance of Lady Tilney's conduct; but it proceeded from a source, which if not in her, in others at least, might be productive of serious consequences; namely, from a contempt of established rules and received opinions; and if, in the midst of this arrogance there was a redeeming spirit of occasional kindness,—a smile which took the heart captive for the moment,

and gave promise of better things,—it only caused a regret that the good which was there should be thus choaked by the noxious weeds of vanity.

Some of Lady Tilney's companions in *ton* had not, like her, escaped the breath of slander; one or more were supposed to have listened, at least, to that corruptive voice of gallantry, which withers the bloom and freshness of a married woman's reputation; whose error is remembered long after its cause has passed away—let it have been real or imaginary;—in either case the effect on a woman's character is the same. It is in vain that in a certain sphere there exists a tacit agreement to pass by, and gloss over such defamatory tales; the persons coming under their degrading mark have a seal set upon them, which, in spite of themselves, and maugre the usage of *their* world, is nevertheless destructive of peace; and it requires little penetration to see beneath the forced smiles which are put on with the adornments of the toilette, the gnawing worm that preys upon the heart.

The fatal effects of such errors attach only to those guilty of them; the feeling inspired for their situation would be one of pure commiseration; but, alas! the influence of example is contagious, and whatever is felt for the individual who thus errs, the sentence of condemnation must go forth against the crime. In regard to the other members who formed Lady Tilney's intimate circle, the Countess Tenderden, Princesse de la Grange, Lady de Chere, and Lady Boileau, for instance, there was equal matter for remark, varying with the character of each. The first of these, possessing nothing decided in her composition, had been, from the commencement, a follower in the track of others, and it was owing to this laziness of disposition that she became the ready and obedient slave of fashionable command, as well as from her early initiation into the secrets of *ton*, rather than from any other cause, that she held the place she did in Lady Tilney's estimation.

Lady Tenderden's unsatisfactory and frivolous existence had thus been passed without

any decided plan, except that of being generally impertinent, and of courting personal admiration ; which, when it is paid to beauty alone, ceases with the first cessation of youth : the consciousness of which fact added no genuine sweetness to the smile of Lady Tenderden ; but left her, although in the possession of most of the outward circumstances which could grace existence, with a fading person and a dissatisfied mind.

Princesse de la Grange was a star in the midst of this false galaxy of *ton*, in as much as a strict regard to married duty, and a preservation of moral and religious principle, gave to her character a superior brightness ; but whether from the taint of the poisonous air she breathed, or from a defect of strength of mind, or from the situation she filled, or from all these circumstances combined, the Princesse de la Grange did not escape entirely the pollution of folly, and she too delighted in the vanity of being exclusive.

In the love of being distinguished above her compeers, Lady de Chere, however, far ex-

celled; attaining a perfection which her exceedingly clever and powerful understanding, together with the management of her conduct, and an appearance of general decorum, enabled her to preserve. Nor were her moral qualities alone conducive to her success: she had besides the advantage of being able to set her face like a flint (which indeed it resembled physically), and she deemed all emotion or all expression of natural feeling (even that of bodily kind) to be a weakness unworthy of a woman of fashion. Lady de Chere was once known on an occasion of personal suffering, when a few tears actually escaped her, to have exclaimed to her attendant: "You are the first person in the world who have ever seen me guilty of such weakness." Nay, she even carried this perfection of induration so far, as to boast of having cut her own mother.

In this last instance of the perfectibility of *ton*, Lady Boileau yielded not the palm—she had remained a good many more years than she had bargained for, unmarried—she had studied under a mother, whose lessons

eventually were but too well rewarded in kind. This mother, however, had loved *her*; and with much and unremitting labour, had effected for her an alliance of title—of wealth. What more could either of them with their views desire?

Lady Marchmont had established her daughter greatly, and the daughter had accepted the marriage upon certain calculations: such as being her own mistress, independent of her husband, or her mother; who knew too well *de quel bois elle se chauffoit*, for Lady Boileau to like her surveillance. Lady Boileau had then made no scruple of swearing to love, honour, and obey him whom she loved *not*, held *cheap*, and determined to *resist*. But these words, and too many more, bear a totally different signification, it is well known, in the language of *ton*, from what they do in their common acceptation.

One of the first steps of Lady Boileau after her marriage, was to gain admission into the circle of Lady Tilney on a footing of intimacy; for although she had been on visiting terms

with her, yet she was aware that the mere interchange of cards did not constitute her the friend or protégé of Lady Tilney, to which distinction she aspired. There were one or two circumstances, however, which rendered the attainment of this object rather difficult. In the first place, Lady Boileau had a mother whom it would require more decided measures to detach from her than, as it has been seen, Lady Tilney chose to countenance. The general tenour of her conduct, too, was a thing yet unproved, and it was, therefore, still unascertained how far she might be true to their *esprit du corps*, and be worthy of admission into this circle. Lady Boileau was considered, notwithstanding these impediments, to be a person of promise, and she was accordingly admitted, with the tacit understanding, however, that she was not to push Lady Marchmont indiscreetly on the scene; where her wit and plain speaking might break forth in corruscations too potent for the *tendre demi-jour*, or rather darkness, in which the proceedings of the *ton par excellence* were invariably to be veiled.

There was, however, one person whose name has not yet figured in the catalogue, but whose character of mixed good and evil, would require a powerful pencil to delineate; for the many amalgamating tints which united and harmonised its opposing lights and shades were any thing but an easy task to give—divested of these, the portrait would become caricature. How often does marriage, especially in early life, give a colour to the future conduct of women. Had Lady Hamlet Vernon married differently, she was possessed of qualities which would have rendered her estimable as well as amiable; and was mistress of talents which, if properly directed and matured, would have rendered her a being distinguished above her sex. But this was not so; she had married for situation, and soon found the burthen she had imposed upon herself far outweighed the advantages she had contemplated in the step she had taken. Unhappiness was the first natural result; and in the absence of religious principle, young, beauteous, and fascinating, she soon found in the universal admiration paid her, a

delusive balm to alleviate the society of a husband considerably older than herself, and who had married her from the pride of calling a person so admired his own. Under these circumstances, Lady Hamlet Vernon could not remain without the stigma of slander attaching to her.

The early demise, however, of Lord Hamlet Vernon liberated her from the hazard of her situation, and at five-and-twenty she found herself again free. Titled, and with great wealth at her command, she was too clever for the empty votaries of folly, but too clever also to be entirely set aside by them. She was, at the same time, too much *sujetté à caution* to be admitted on terms of unguarded intimacy amongst those in her own sphere who were observers of religious and moral conduct, and who happily form the aggregate of distinguished society in England. Left without choice, therefore, as to who should be her associates, Lady Hamlet Vernon was drawn into a society where the errors of her early conduct were, by the contagion of example, sure to be confirmed, and the remainder of any good principles that

she might have possessed, in danger of being subverted; for it was not the least evil arising out of the system of the society alluded to, that the persons composing it were under a compact of exclusion of all who differed from them in habit and opinions; and, thus deprived of the power of comparison, their own conduct wanted that useful touchstone of its rectitude.

We are all alive to impressions daily made upon us; and if a life of carelessness and dissipation is not to be checked by an occasional example of what is truly excellent and worthy in character, the moral perception between right and wrong of its mistaken votaries will soon be blunted, till at last both their ears and eyes are closed to all remonstrance. The riper in years, therefore, were sure to have their false estimate of life confirmed; *they* could not return on their steps, even if they wished it; while the young and the inconsiderate were taught to believe, that those who had so long followed in that destructive but glittering career, were the only objects worthy of imitation, and in their turn became hardened

actors in the scene. Although the characters hitherto produced as slaves to this system have been of the weaker sex alone, still let it not be imagined that they were its only victims, or that they alone played their part in upholding it.

If possible, the men of the society were many of them as frivolous, and more vicious; and, though here and there might be found a character that, from family connection or ignorance of the tendency of the society, mingled in its contamination without infection, or making a wreck of principle, yet, far from these solitary instances detracting from the general truth of what has been said, it will be found that such persons, the moment they became aware of the lurking evil, broke from it abruptly; though perhaps, saving themselves with difficulty from the entanglement.

In the members, however, which swelled the list of the male part of this circle, few indeed were there who ever made an effort to withdraw from it. Vice and folly, in manners and in dress—male coquetry—ineffable imperti-

nence—ignorance—detraction of virtue which might have resisted, or talents which eclipsed them—insipidity in mind, and effeminacy in person—devotion to luxury,—these, and more than these, if such could be catalogued, of the immoralities and follies of man, were all to be found here, in degree and kind, revolving in their different orbits—and fulfilling their allotted parts in the system, till their existence closed. What though wit might sometimes play around their board, or the quick repartee enliven the monotonous circle of the evening—what though talent might be allowed, for a brief season, to expatiate on higher topics, and the deep discourse of great human learning might be suffered to dwell at intervals on subjects more intellectual—yet what profited this to those who listened or to those who spoke?—The moment's amusement, the indulgence of mere curiosity, the establishing of some political tenet or philosophical dogma, were alone the objects looked to. Talents, when found in this society, were in fact directed to none but *worldly* views; and the feeling

which should have guided their possessors to acknowledge the bounty of the Author who bestowed them, and a faithful employment of his gifts, was not only wanting, but the sacred religion of that very Author was too frequently made an exercise for them—a subject of their scorn or cavil.

Though untitled, yet of noble family, there was one, who figured first as most licentious and unprincipled among the devotees of *ton*. He was handsome, winning, specious; but he concealed under this attractive exterior a heart of the blackest dye; no sense of right or wrong checked its impulses. All to him was lawful that was attainable. Pleasure was his object; and he had sailed down the short voyage of his life unchecked by any of those reverses, unscared by any of those feelings of shame or compunction, which would have operated on a weaker mind; and if, for a moment, some enormity of conduct made the more timid—they could not be called the more virtuous—of his associates recoil, the hardened face, the laugh of carelessness, the ready excuse, soon

dissipated these transient feelings of shame ; and patronized, courted, upheld, in that true *esprit de corps* which bound each member of the society to protect the other, his youthful career had been run from excess to excess.

Although a person whose weight and influence in themselves were not great, yet he formed from his habits and opinions, and the talents which (though perverted) he really possessed, one of those ties in a fabric, which being multiplied, keep the whole body compact ; and, having once obtained a footing in Lady Tilney's circle, it followed, as a matter of course, that he should be employed in that remodelling of her society, which it has been seen Lady Tilney was so anxious to effect, and his name therefore was not forgotten in the list, concerning which she intended to consult Prince Luttermann.

It is well for human nature, that many characters such as have been just described are not often found ; it certainly had no compeer in the circle in which it moved. And though the folly of dress—the waste of time—the use-

lessness of life—indulgence in the excess of luxury, are errors and faults that cannot be too strongly held up to animadversion, yet they are, by comparison, of a venial kind. Their effects, however, ultimately do not prove such; for degradation of intellect must follow a course of indolence, and an obtuseness of conscience must be the consequence of long-neglected duties. Let it not be supposed, therefore, that because Lord Boileau, Lord Baskerville, Lord Marchmont, or Lord Tonnerre, were younger and less matured in a vicious course than another, that therefore their conduct was less deserving of moral censure—the seed that is sown in spring time will grow up to the harvest, and it must be reaped accordingly. The pursuits of a careless life of pleasure, the gaming-table, the society of opera dancers, the intrigues of *ton*, are not preparations for the maintenance of family consequence and wealth, still less for the fulfilment of the duties of married life, the protection of a wife's conduct, or the education of their offspring. Yet these, it is to be feared, were

the sole objects of Lord Boileau, of his companions, and of many others.

Besides these, however, there were characters intended to be included in Lady Tilney's arrangements of a far different complexion, and the very reverse of their inexistence—there were noble politicians, whose lives were passed in any thing but inactivity; there were titled wits, whose places were any thing but sinecures; poets, whose lays found frequent subjects in the galaxy of beauty that surrounded them; and painters, whose talents and winning flatteries constituted their patent of nobility. The admission of all the latter personages was a decided evidence of Lady Tilney's supremacy; for, with few exceptions, she alone considered that to be surrounded by talents was essential to high station, since with the generality of her coterie, the idea of mingling intellect in their pleasures, was rather to destroy than heighten them.

Lady Tilney, however, in the end prevailed, and no society of *ton* was in future considered complete without those appendages. But even

Lady Tilney's command of the suffrage of talents was not always absolute; and once, it is said, a man of holy profession, whose celebrity in his calling had led the London world in crowds to be his auditors, though thrice bidden to the shrine of fashion, declined, with steady consistency, to form one of a circle whose conduct in life it was his duty to reprove.

It is not to be supposed that the list of cavaliers is yet full with the names of the persons just alluded to; there were many others too insignificant to bear designation—and enough of portraits. Catalogues of these can only be interesting to a few curious collectors, and are very unsatisfactory to the generality of persons. It is living with the actors on the shifting scene, which can alone, for any length of time, engage the attention, or be productive of any just understanding of the character. To note down their actions as they occur, and to develop the system by which their lives are regulated, will be the easiest, as well as the most profitable task; for although there may be something which at first appears unnatural, and scarcely

to be recognised as truth, in the idea that there exists a regular and defined system in lives, which at a hasty glance seem spent in the careless manner of the persons represented, nevertheless it is so—and there is a depth in their folly, which requires to be sounded,—there is a mischief in their apparent carelessness, which it is wise to detect—there is a principle of latent evil under this seeming incipency of conduct, which requires to be unfolded, and shewn in its true colours.

CHAPTER III.

AN OLD-FASHIONED ASSEMBLY.

ALTHOUGH the outlines of Lady Tilney's project had been generally settled, yet some of its details were still wanting; and in the interval, she determined on one of those movements in the game, which a crafty adversary sometimes makes to cover an ultimate and deeper end. The Marchioness of Feuillermerte held one of her assemblies, and as it was admissible to appear in such a circle once at least during the season, *sans se compromettre*, Lady Tilney devoted herself for that evening to the unpalatable task, and engaged Lady Ellersby to meet her.

After casting a glance of inquiry round the room, "My dear," said she, "did you ever in your life see such an heterogeneous multitude (she loved long, hard words) as are assembled here?"

“No, except here”—“Figures,” continued Lady Tilney, “*renouvelés des Grecs*—creatures dug out of Herculaneum, only not so elegant; all George the Third’s court I believe; and then such a tiresome eternity of royalty, persons who never die, and whom Lady Feuilleterte, and Lady Borrowdale have preserved, together with themselves, in spirits, I believe, to exhibit on their great nights.”

“Yes,” rejoined Mr. Frank Ombre, who had been permitted to overhear the whisper, and smiling with one of those doubtful expressions which might do for tragic or for comic effect, “we do not want royalty now to keep us in order,—that is quite an obsolete idea. No, we have more enlarged views; we like to turn every thing, *sans dessus dessous*—don’t we Lady Tilney? I am sure I had rather bow to the sceptre of your beauty, than to that of any prince or princess—and you know I never flatter.” At that moment a royal personage entered the assembly, when Lady Tilney, under pretence of going away,

hurried to the door, saying, "oh, do let me avoid this *seccatura*."

"Do, Mr. Spencer Newcombe," addressing this privileged friend of her own circle who stood near her, "do call my carriage,"—in the meanwhile placing herself in a situation that made it impossible, without rudeness, for the person whose approach she would have appeared to shun, to pass her by unregarded; a behaviour which, however consistent with Lady Tilney's ill breeding, when she wished to shew dislike, was never known to attach to any of the family who were the objects of her pretended contempt.

Lady Tilney did not, on the present occasion, make her arrangements in vain, and was not only spoken to, but held so long in conversation by the royal person who entered, that she had the satisfaction of hearing her carriage repeatedly announced, till every individual of the assembly must have been aware of the cause of her delay. The dense crowd, however, which now encircled the prince, seemed to oppress Lady Tilney, and

affecting to be almost overcome by the pressure,—a pressure which in fact she was herself causing, by obstinately keeping her place, and not allowing the conversation to drop—she was at length gratified by an offer of the arm of royalty to lead her to a seat, on which she sank affectedly, while the prince took that next to her. In one of the pauses of conversation which ensued, Mr. Ombre chanced to find himself exactly at the back of Lady Tilney's chair, and she took an opportunity of whispering to him, "how tiresome!" He shrugged his shoulders, and replied in her ear, "I pity you from the bottom of my heart," (adding aside to Spencer Newcombe), "As I do every one who always succeeds in every thing they wish."

Shortly after, the prince rose to depart to speak to others, while Lady Tilney having made good her right to royal attention, now prepared to express her contumely of every thing regal, and to resume the exercise of her own right to absolute power in her own person.

“ Do, Mr. Ombre, sit down and let me have a *little* real conversation with you, for I am sick of all the *fadaises* which have just passed.” “ What a fortunate man,” he rejoined, “ shall I be, if I have only a *little* conversation with Lady Tilney!—you know I never flatter,—and besides that distinction, a seat,”—dropping carelessly into the one that was vacant.

But Lady Tilney did not read these words otherwise than in the sense to which they were agreeable to her, and immediately her hitherto repressed eloquence broke forth.

“ Have you read the *Male Coquet*? Do tell me, is it not exquisite? Among all the trash heaped upon people of fashion, this alone is well done. It must be confessed that, in spite of its severity, the whole is well drawn, and though highly coloured, not a daub.”

“ Yes, I have read it, and I like it; but the world don't.”

“ No! well I cannot conceive why—perhaps you can tell me.—Not like it! indeed you surprise me! Why, it has already gone through three editions.”

“ Yes, in the advertisements ! but they say the publisher is ruined, nevertheless.”

“ Well ! that is quite extraordinary ! I thought all the world approved it.”

“ The world !—the world, my dear Lady Tilney, is a very ill-natured world, though you have never found it so ; but you will some day.”

“ Oh, do not imagine,” cried Lady Tilney, a little displeasèd at her supposed want of discernment, “ do not suppose that I am not quite aware of the world’s ill-nature—only —”

“ Only you are bound, my dear friend, to suppose it otherwise, since, in its opinion of you, it does indeed make an exception.”

“ You know I hate flattery, Mr. Ombre.”—
“ Well, well, I have done ; but in some cases, what appears flattery, is truth. Besides, I never *do flatter*.”

“ Come, come,” said Lady Tilney, “ never mind ! let us return to the Male Coquet, I have not half done talking about it. What do you think of the character of Lord Algeron, is it not delightful, is it not quite per-

fect? — And for that very reason, quite detestable.”

“ My dear lady, I never knew but one perfect person in the world whom I could bear; do you guess who I mean?”

“ Dear me, are you still here?” said Lady Ellersby, approaching at the moment.

“ Yes—you know when those royalties *will* talk to one, it is impossible to get away.”—

“ Ah, true—and it is so fatiguing.”—“ Royalties—dose royalties, and you mind *dem*?” said the Comtesse Leinsengen, who had caught Lady Tilney’s words as she passed, leaning on the arm of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

“ My dear Lady Tilney, I wonder to see *you* here—but you always do de reverse of what you talk, you know—I tell you so.”

Lady Tilney was embarrassed, and looked around for an escape from the conversation. She saw the half-formed sentence preparing by Lord Rainham; which, however, she knew must undergo the necessary process of pre-organization and arrangement before it was addressed to her. Luckily the Comtesse Lein-

sengen pressed forward before this could take place, and Lady Tilney, to avoid any more sarcasm on her inconsistency, willingly allowed for once the witty Lord to pass without a word. Mr. Ombre, who was still by her side, and had lost nothing of the scene, gave his word of consolation to Lady Tilney, as he remarked:

“ How appropriate to the situation which he fills;—the ready orator, the decided projector of measures and expedients,—how truly great a minister ! You know, Lady Tilney, I never flatter. I really think so.” Lady Tilney had no wish to continue the subject, and turning to Lady Ellersby, remarked,

“ Did you ever see such jewels as the Duchess of Hermanton’s ? How vulgar to wear them in such quantities ; she is like a walking chandelier. But, look, there is Lord Arlingford ; he is coming this way—I want to speak to him, and if you move a step or two forward, I shall be able to do so.” Lord Arlingford was accordingly arrested on his passage, for he had not intended to converse with Lady

Tilney, but was looking on towards a group of persons, in the midst of whom stood the Duchess of Hermanton. "Well, Lord Arlingford, how surprised I am to see *you* here; are you not bored to death?"

"Why, Lady Tilney," he asked, in return, "should you be surprised to see me in an assembly to which half London is invited?"

"That is precisely the reason," she replied, "I should have thought you never went to these sort of things; they are very tiresome, and I am sure you must be dreadfully annoyed."

Lord Arlingford was not an apt *élève* of Lady Tilney's, although his high rank and connexions had made her sedulously endeavour to direct his education in the world of *ton* from his very first *début*.

"Pardon me, not in the least *ennuyé*. I do not come often enough, or remain long enough in these places, to be sickened by the shew—and *as* a shew, it is a very splendid one, and I like to see so much beauty as is here to-night gather together."

“ Fewer at a time,” said Lady Tilney, “ would be more agreeable, I should think.”

“ Perhaps so, for habitual private society ; but then that is quite another affair : all things are good in their way, and in their proper season and measure.” Lady Tilney was mortified at this very rational distinction of the indocile Lord, but went on to say, “ At least you will allow that a circle more *choisie* is preferable—and one comes to this sort of mob only as a kind of disagreeable duty.”—“ Duty ! that is quite a new idea of duty to me—but I am happy to be taught by so fair an instructress.” As he spoke, Lord Arlingford’s grave countenance (for it was a countenance of gravity for so young a man) relaxed into something like vivacity ; and Lady Tilney, profiting by the momentary gleam of expression, requested him to assist her through the crowd, in order that she might speak to the Duchess of Hermanton.

“ You will come, will you not, Lady Ellersby ?” turning her head over her shoulder as she spoke.

“ No (for at this moment the Duke of Mercington was coming towards her), “ I have already seen the Duchess.” Lady Tilney would then have lingered, glad to have exchanged the arm on which she leant for that of the man of still higher rank ; but the Duke only making her the acknowledgment of a familiar nod, offered his arm to Lady Ellersby, and as her friend walked away in a contrary direction, Lady Tilney, mortified, bit her lip, and was obliged to proceed.

The crowd in the door-way soon stopped her progress, and turning to her companion, she observed,

“ I wonder how many private couriers Lady Borrowdale keeps in pay, to bring over the newest fashions from Paris. Have you seen her to-night? did you ever behold any thing like the magnificence of her gown ?”—“ I think,” replied Lord Arlingford, “ that she is a very fine-looking person, and in her youth must have been perfectly beautiful ; but I did not observe her gown.” The subject seemed to inspire Lord Arlingford, who broke through

the usual briefness of his sentences as he continued, "And her manner, I think, is excellent; there is so much dignity in it, united with so much courtesy; and she is never, I am told, capricious, or forgetful of good-breeding."

"Why, my dear Lord Arlingford, this is an oration—you are quite eloquent! But you cannot really like that old-fashioned *manière* of curtsying."

"Indeed I am serious; I like it very much: and if I were to point out the person whose manners I should like to see any one I loved adopt, in public at least—for I have not the honour of her intimate acquaintance—it would be Lady Borrowdale's."

"How singular you are! Really, if you entertain such opinions as these, we must expel you from our circle. But if you are determined to be extraordinary, I suppose you will tell me that you cannot bear any thing that is younger or more modern."

"Pardon me; there is Lady Georgina Melcombe, and the Ladies Fitzmaurice, and their cousins, the Ladies Partington, and many

others, who look as if they were every thing which the young and lovely ought to be,—unaffected, cheerful, and courteous.”

“ Oh, this is worse and worse; you are becoming quite insufferable. But do tell me who is that person there, whose appearance is so particular, and who has so extraordinary an air—is he a foreigner?”

“ No—that is Lord Albert d’Esterre. Are you not acquainted with him? He is a very charming person,—full of talent, and very handsome, as you see. But I forget—you cannot well recollect him, for he went to the Continent as a boy, and is only lately returned.”

“ True; I remember—I hear he is likely to distinguish himself—pray present him to me.”

The presentation took place; and, after a few words, including an invitation to Lord Albert to her *soirées*, Lady Tilney passed on with Lord Arlingford to where the Duchess of Hermanton was standing.

To have taken pains thus to seek one whom

she affected to despise, whose manners and right to fashion she was perpetually calling in question, might argue great inconsistency; but in this instance Lady Tilney's wishes to be well with the Duchess of Hermanton, far from being the result of any thing like the contradiction of a settled principle, were the absolute fruits of it, and were influenced by a feeling of fear—if she would have confessed it—by an apprehension that that really amiable person, possessing the envied superiority of united rank and birth and talent, should assume her proper place in society, and overthrow the false rule to which Lady Tilney herself laid claim. It was therefore conciliation rather; and, as she addressed the Duchess, she put on her sweetest smiles, and laid aside those indescribable airs which were displayed when she intended to scorn or crush; and, while uttering those nothings which form the sum and substance of what is said on such occasions, her manners were almost servile. The simplicity of unquestioned superiority is one of its most sure characteristics; and the Duchess of

Hermanton's mode of receiving this homage was unaffected and courteous. But as the two persons had little similarity in their natures, the conference lasted only sufficiently long for Lady Tilney to preserve that degree of familiarity in acquaintance, which she determined should prevent her being a stranger to one too independent and distinguished to be altogether passed over.

Meanwhile, Lord Arlingford having profited by the opportunity to quit Lady Tilney, now joined Lady Georgina Melcombe and some of the persons standing together in another part of the room; and Lady Tilney, thus left alone, had, for a few moments, leisure to behold the splendour of the apartments and of the persons met in them. In her heart she could not but acknowledge that whatever London could boast as being most distinguished was present, and that the good and great predominated; but it was *not exclusive*—that is, it was an assembly constituted of almost all those whose rank entitled them to be on the list of Lady Feuillermerte's visitors.

It was numerous, therefore, which is the very essence of an assembly; for what is so insipid as public receptions where the members are few, the rooms half filled, and the scene unenlivened by those circumstances which a diversity of ages, characters, and dresses cast around?

Here all met the society which best accorded with their tastes. The politician, the courtier, the man of fashion, found here their associates and their amusement, each in their different sphere, as they retired from the rest to discuss some present topic of public interest, or glided through the throng with that easy politeness which breathed of the atmosphere they inhaled in the presence of their Sovereign, paying the well-timed compliment as they passed, or displaying the refinement of wit and repartee in their short and animated conversations.

Here, too, amidst the younger and fresher forms, beauties of former days still shone in the dignity of their manners, and of that air and carriage which the fashion of their time had rendered a portion of themselves; which lent a grace to their every movement, and

might well have afforded a school of manners and propriety of outward bearing for the young who mingled with them—in counteraction of the oblivion and extermination of all manners, which the prevailing system of the *soi-disant* members of *ton* would have enforced.

Such, at least, were the external features of an old-fashioned assembly—in its moral character the advantages were no less. Its honest and avowed purpose was the interchange of those courtesies which render life agreeable, and the preservation of those general guards in society which, as checks to profligacy, are more useful than abstract theories of ethics, or codes of moral laws. People, unless lost, sin not so blindly in mixed communities—one individual forms a restraint on the others—children stand in a we of parents, and these, in their turn, acknowledge a wholesome control in the presence of their offspring—the good are a terror to the evil (for an alloy will ever exist); while the one and the other mutually afford examples of imitation, or beacons of danger to be avoided, which every individual may, if

there be the will, turn to profit, in the correction of some temper, the curbing of some excess, the chastening of some wish, or the abandonment of some folly.

The more intimate associations in life are not here spoken of; but these in characters of the same description as Lady Feuillermerte's, would doubtless be founded on the same basis, and have the same objects in view; for whether in the cherishing of natural affections, the formation of those friendships which spring up in the domestic circle, the cultivation and exercise of talents which give a charm to existence, or the acquirement of more important attainments, the system which holds out examples, and affords restraint, will ever be best.

The "*société choisie*," however, which Lady Tilney desired to form, was, in its nature, the very reverse of what has been described. Its exclusive character was to consist, not in the selection of what was amiable in nobility, or virtuous in talent; it was not to be the circle drawn within a narrower circumference, for a

more perfect enjoyment of private friendship, or the cultivation of more intellectual pursuits than the wide range of fashionable life could afford; it was not to be retirement from the busier throng, for the purposes of a more rational and purer existence; but it was to consist of those whose follies in the pursuit of pleasure, and whose weakness in the indulgence of all the empty toys of life, had given them a distinction above their fellows; of those who judged immorality, when burnished by the tinsel of superficial acquirements, as venial error;—of those, in short, who were either senseless or wicked enough to consider life but a bubble, to be blown down the current, according to the dictates of the will, and whose daily existence testified, that they were alike without a thought or a fear for the morrow's eternity. Such were to be its members, and its seclusion from the general eye of the world, its secession from all others but—; its rigid law, that unmarried women were not eligible to its chosen meetings—for what purpose, and to what end were these? If for

vanity of distinction, merely, it was weak; if for the purpose of indulging in pursuits and conversation, which would receive a check in a society less selected for the object—it was wicked. In whichever point of view, a society so constituted must be demoralizing, for assuredly it would have the character of being, if it even were not, really vicious—and its example would have a contaminating effect in the corruption of morals, and the overthrow of the barriers of domestic peace.

It cannot be said that these were the reflections of Lady Tilney, as she stood for the few moments alone in the crowd at Lady Feuillermerte's. It would be injustice to her to suppose that they were, or that she contemplated in the formation of a coterie, according to her own peculiar prejudices, any of the evils with which the system was sure to be pregnant. It is thus, however, with all reforms, entered upon for private ends; the individual sees but the accomplishment of his own and his immediate associates' views, in what is to be overturned; and the fatal result accruing to the

community, even if clearly distinguished, are at the moment but as dust in the balance of self.

It is more probable that, as Lady Tilney gazed on the mingled group around her, blind to the demerits of her projected revolution of society, and proud of influence, which over a certain portion of the London world she had succeeded in establishing, she became firmer in her purpose; and as her eye fell on one individual after another, whose manners, mode of life, dress, or very name were disagreeable to her, or proved them wanting in the stamp of ideal fashion, the necessity of the measure she contemplated she conceived became more and more imperative. Whatever might have been Lady Tilney's reflections, she was not long suffered to indulge them. In the tide which passed before her appeared Lord Rainham, unattended however, as previously, by the Comtesse Leinsengen: Lady Tilney therefore awaited his address, without any appearance of recurrence to her professed distaste for royalty.

“ A marvel, I declare !” were the opening words of a speech already polished, *usque ad unquam*, before Lord Rainham ventured to give it utterance.—“ Behold Lady Tilney without a crowd of worshippers at her feet !— Explain me this phenomenon, and say, have you been cruel to your slaves, and are they gone themselves, or have they forgotten their allegiance ? Such things have been, though they ought not to be—and yet methinks you would find it sufficiently dull, if all things were as they ought to be, would you not ? tell me the truth, and give me your confidence ; I have long wished to have the confidence of a handsome woman, and I promise you *indulgentius plenaria*.”

“ No, not for the world !—I hold it to be quite a false maxim to have any confidants : besides I have nothing to confide.”

“ You are too wise to be so handsome,” said Lord Rainham abruptly, “ and so good night ; for since you will not parley with me, ’tis in vain I linger ;” and as he turned away, words of fresh *impromptu* on

some other subject began audibly to escape his lips.

“In your orisons be all my sins remembered,” whispered Mr. Ombre as he passed, and again found himself at Lady Tilney’s side. “It is high time such bookworms as I should retire into our cells; so, lady sweet, good night.—You know it is not I who speak, but he, who would have been blest, could he have poured all his sweetest lays into that gentle ear.” Lady Tilney considered the homage of talent as peculiarly her own, and would gladly have retained the speaker; but gliding with the gentle undulation of some shadowy form towards the door, he escaped the infliction of a penalty, which even the syren smiles which were his reward could hardly at times repay.

It was now growing late—the assembly was breaking up, and Lady Tilney looked anxiously for some *cavalier* to attend her to her carriage: but this was not a point of easy settlement. In degree he must be either of rank, or a dependent—one who was her equal, or

one on whom she might confer distinction by her choice of his services. Neither such requisites, however, were to be found in the group around, and Lady Tilney, whilst feeling yet more and more the necessity of an exclusive circle, where such predicaments would be avoided, was doomed still further mortification in the approach of Colonel Temple, a person whom she hardly ever considered recognizable, and whose offer of assistance, made evidently with sarcastic reference to her being alone, came in a shape particularly offensive to her.

“ Will you allow me to have the honour of calling your carriage,” he said, addressing her with easy familiarity; “ or if you are going to walk through the rooms, allow me to escort you ?” (offering his arm).

“ No,” said Lady Tilney, in a manner that might have awed any one else; “ I am going away immediately.”

“ Well, then, let me call your carriage,” he replied, with a tenacity that nothing could evade—whilst Lady Tilney continued to move on, terrified lest she should be seen *so* attended.

This apparent anxiety to avoid him, was, however, with Colonel Temple, the surest incitement to a continuance of his proffered attentions. It might not have been exactly consistent with the general high breeding and politeness which distinguished Lady Feuillermerte's assemblies, for any one to have acted under this influence perhaps; but Col. Temple was a character known to all the world as such, and privileged to do things which no one else did. He was a man, too, of family, and felt his situation in society, in the midst of all his eccentricities. His want of refinement had its compensation in an honesty of disposition quite at variance with the measured forms of fashionable exclusiveness, but which made him generally beloved; while his shrewd sense, mixed with a certain vein of sarcastic humour, always penetrated the littleness of vanity, and often inflicted on it its severest wounds.

Lady Tilney, from repeated slights, was a darling object of his attacks, and could she without compromise have purchased immunity from their never-failing and success-

ful arrogance, by an honourable truce, she would gladly have done so. But Col. Temple was *too* arrogant, *too* presumptuous, to be checked by any defiance of ultra fashion—too independent, too high-spirited, to suffer a cold and haughty recognition, in place of the politeness and courtesy due to him as a gentleman, and thus this warfare had become interminable.

Enjoying his triumphs in the way in question, he followed Lady Tilney from room to room—even to the steps of her carriage, assuring her as they proceeded, that her apprehensions of being detected in his society were compliments to him beyond price; he was aware that, to be of importance, the next thing to being liked, was being feared—and bidding her be sure to send him a card for her next choice *soirée*, he handed his victim into her carriage, under a thousand half-pronounced inuendos upon his insufferable vulgarity, and the awful anathema of future exclusion.

CHAPTER IV.

A MODERN COTERIE.

IF any circumstance had been wanting to give strength to Lady Tilney's resolves on the momentous question of social reform, the occurrences at Lady Feuillemerete's were in themselves sufficient—at least, they formed an addition to that kind of plausible excuse, sought for on all occasions where the will is previously set on a particular line of conduct, but which, without a pretext, it would hardly be safe for the individual to adopt.

The motley and unkindred assemblage of the previous evening, with its royal restraints, its want of organization in its inferior members, and the consequent offences experienced by those of higher order—for Lady Tilney, although she did not divulge the stain inflicted by Colonel Temple's assiduities, yet felt it deeply,—were points she dwelt upon to her col-

leagues on the following morning with that extreme pathos and eloquence which the sufferings of self never fail to produce, and which could not but enforce on her auditors conviction of the necessity of the measures she proposed.

Closeted, therefore, with the leading characters in her own peculiar circle, the final arrangements for that *société choisie* which was to eclipse courts and banish sovereigns, to school rank, and bring to maturity all the yet unripened follies of a *soi-disant ton*, were at length concluded. The lists were full—the doors were closed to all but the secret representatives of the system, and the anathema went forth. Strange that St. James's did not shake from its foundation, England's sovereign resign his sceptre, and her lengthened line of nobility crouch in the dust, under the awful denunciation of such an ascendancy. But though this were not so—yet must the loyalty of many a high-born subject, and the purity of many a noble and virtuous mind, have been outraged, when the results of a system at once

so contemptuous and immoral began to be developed.

It will be remembered that Lady Tilney had already fixed on the evening of Lady Borrowdale's assembly as a fitting occasion for the display of her own undivided rule in the empire of fashion. Her cards had been issued for that purpose, and these were now followed by injunctions through various channels, requiring an early attendance—since the two syrens of the day, Pasta and Sontag, it was whispered, were engaged to give additional effect to the opening charms of exclusiveness, and render the blow struck at the existing state of society at once decisive.

Lady Borrowdale's apartments, it was decreed, should possess only the *canaille* of the fashionable world, and royalty be doomed to oblivion there, in the surpassing lustre which Lady Tilney's circle would display. To the authority that called for this ready obedience, none of the satellites of Lady Tilney's court were ever known to offer resistance;—and though the chiefs of her party alone knew the

real object of the summons, yet the uninitiated hastened to obey it with the same alacrity as their superiors, satisfied that in so doing they were best consulting their views of advancement to the distinction courted by them, as well as securing a greater license in the indulgence of those follies and errors which made the sum of their daily occupation.

To tell of the decoration of the apartments, of the splendour and luxury which reigned around the mansion of Lady Tilney, to dwell on externals, would be to repeat descriptions a thousand times given, and tend to no development of import. A plant, under the fairest guise of colour or of form, sometimes contains within its fibres the deadliest poison ; and in the scorching plains of the East, the upas-tree extends an alluring shade over the exhausted and unconscious traveller, who is soon to sink beneath its deadly atmosphere. But what would it profit were the naturalist to dwell only on the pencilling and texture of the one, or the traveller describe vaguely the outspreading branches and inviting coolness of

the other, and yet neglect to record the noxious qualities and inherent dangers of each. The plant and its virtues, not the scene in which it is to be found, must first be recognised and known, if escape from its contagion be intended;—and it is to the habits and system of a people, not to the country they inhabit, that we must look, rightly to understand the manner in which their lives are passed.

To a casual observer, Lady Tilney's assembly presented no distinguishing external marks at variance with received habits or customs. The rooms were not darkened, the servants passed through the apartments at intervals in the performance of their respective duties without constraint: the company, however, was less numerous, and more scattered and divided into detached parties. The conversation, with the exception of Lady Tilney herself, was carried on in a low tone, scarcely audible but to the individual addressed; the different members of the coterie, when they moved about,

seemed to do so under certain measured and stated paces.

It was not, however, the step and air of real dignity of fashion, but rather the mincing *minauderie* of *des petites maîtresses*. Whatever was done or spoken (when for a moment some general observation was hazarded), appeared as if performed by rule, and under apprehension of drawing down ridicule, which at once went to destroy all natural grace of speech or demeanour. This sentiment attached more particularly to the younger and newer noviciates, who felt that an unguarded expression, or a movement at variance with the prescribed forms of the circle, would render them the objects of the malicious remarks and sneers of the more experienced—an uneasy restraint, therefore, was often the consequence; and had it not been, that to form part of so chosen a society, and under Lady Tilney's roof, was in itself an indescribable satisfaction—some who were there might have been suspected of suffering considerable *ennui*, and of being ready to admit, by the suppressed and ill-concealed yawn, that

although the honour of exclusiveness was great, the pleasure was certainly small.

Not so, however, with the more initiated—these appeared by habit to take the part at once most to their tastes; to select the companion most agreeable to them; to remain under the eye of observation, or retire from it, as they chose, with indifference;—for it was not only in *what* was done or said, but in the *manner*, also, that the distinguishing characteristics of this coterie were to be detected. All things were lawful—but then under outward forms (not however of propriety always, or of morality), but of convention; and whoever attained fulfilment of these, had the privilege, the *indulgentia plenaria*, as proposed by Lord Rainham, to sin with impunity.

When it was said, therefore, that an assembly composed as the present differed not in its appearance from others passing under the same generic name, it was premised to be only under the impression of a first view;—a more intimate acquaintance with many of its laws and practices, so opposed to received customs

in the world, could not in the end fail to astonish! And first the observer (the moral observer is meant) would have been struck by the discovery, that the young and beautiful in this magic circle were all married women, and that the person who individually (for the number was rarely more than singular) paid his assiduous court, leant over the chair, and whispered into the ear of the fair whom he selected or was selected by, was no aspirant to her hand in marriage, no relative—neither was he her husband—but a member of the privileged society, which was alone sufficient.

His astonishment would have been yet stronger on discovering that for a season, till mutual convenience, or disagreement dissolved their familiar acquaintance, each party, similarly paired, invariably met, conversed, and retired at the same time, when the circle broke up, or when they quitted it, apparently on the same footing of intimacy which the most holy ties could have sanctioned; while those whom such a tie actually bound to them were themselves pursuing a similar career.

Had the conversation which for the most part occupied this portion of the *société choisie* been reported, or reached the ear, it is possible a considerate mind might have thought, notwithstanding the singularity of a system which excluded the unmarried from scenes of amusement, that it was well they formed no portion of it; but still, in an escape from its early influence, enjoyed the opportunity of attaining to a degree of moral principle, and feminine decorum, which must otherwise have been swept away in the general license.

This, however, can unfortunately be said only of the one sex—the unmarried in the other, provided their attainments were of the kind to authorize admission, were not on the excluded list; and the young, well-principled, and ingenuous perhaps at their outset, might, in the examples constantly before them, have found incentive to conduct, which at a future day they would discover to have been the great bane and poison of their existence.—Of these the person who entered Lady Tilney's apartments when the coterie had nearly

assembled, and who was new to most of them, offered an instance, for whom the liveliest fears with justice might have been entertained.

Young, strikingly handsome, talented, of high rank, of widely extended interest, and possessing all the means of gratifying every wish, to what dangers was not Lord Albert d'Esterre exposed, in such a scene as has been described, and on which he was from that evening to play a part! He seemed, with the impulse of natural politeness, to look around for Lady Tilney, as he entered, as if he would pay his first homage to her, whose self and not her house he visited; in a manner directly the reverse of that false refinement of modern *ton*, which seeks a display of its *scavoir vivre*, in a pointed indifference to all the received forms of society.

Before he had reached the second room he was met by Lady Tilney, with a greater degree of courtesy and *empressement* than was usual in her receptions; and his address was listened to with more complacency and patience than generally marked her manner

towards any one.—“Who is he?” passed in whispers round the circle amongst those to whom he was unknown.—“Did you hear his name announced?”—“No! I have seen him somewhere before, I think—is it not Lord Albert d’Esterre, Lord ——’s son?”

“Ah true, it is! but what an extraordinary lengthy speech he is making—surely Lady Tilney must be ready to expire under its duration.”—“Not under its dulness, I am certain,” said Lord Glenmore, as he caught Lady Baskerville’s remark to Lord Rainham, “for, d’Esterre is too clever ever to say a dull thing.” “Or ever do a wise one, perhaps,” added Lord Rainham in his most caustic manner.

“Did you hear Rainham?” whispered Spencer Newcombe to Ombre; “there was no time for gestation there—it was really well said.”—“Then, if so,” replied his neighbour, “we may ‘for once a miracle accept instead of wit.’”

“No; I do not allow of miracles now a days,” said Lord Rainham, turning sharply round, having overheard the remark applied

to him: "I do not believe in miracles—not even in the resurrection of the Glacier man—do you, Ombre?" The laugh was with the latter speaker; but Mr. Ombre thought that, in fact, miracles had not ceased when Lord Rainham could thus improvise two good things without incubation; and so he whispered into the ear of his friend Spencer Newcombe, as Lord Rainham moved away.

While Lord Albert D'Esterre was thus affording subject of remark to the coterie, and their observations in turn made matter of ill-natured review among themselves, he was addressing his courteous excuse to Lady Tilney for having disobeyed her commands, in arriving so late. Lady Baskerville was probably right in her conjecture, that Lady Tilney felt considerably bored by his doing so, and making reference to injunctions which she had forgotten the moment they were given, because certain they would be generally obeyed, and Lady Borrowdale's assembly be left untenanted by all her early visitors.

She heard him, however, with smiles and

outward complaisance; for Lord Albert was of consequence enough in a political way, at least, for Lady Tilney to court; and as she assured him that he was still in good time, and that the Sontag had not yet sung, presented him to several persons, whom, she remarked, would be almost strangers to him after so long an absence from England.

In all, however, that Lord Albert had said, he had been sincere; and in his manner towards the different persons he was made known to, there was a genuine distinguished air of high breeding and politeness, as much at variance with the manners, as his ingenuousness was with the minds and dispositions of those who figured in the moral masquerade before him. Although fresh in this scene, and therefore without contamination, he was powerful, and, therefore, worth appropriation; and what was considered *outré* and too *manière* in his address, was partially overlooked at the moment, as certain to give way under the powerful influence of better examples.

The Sontag now came forward and poured

her liquid notes mellifluous through the assembly. Every body was in raptures—indiscriminate raptures;—for though raptures were generally obsolete, there were a few short seasons for a few new things in which it was permitted to be rapturous; but woe to the unhappy individual who, ignorant of the mark, gave way to these ebullitions at unallowed times, or beyond the peculiar limits prescribed by *ton*.

When the *aria* was concluded, however, the remarks among the younger votaries of fashion were principally directed to the figure and appearance of the singer, rather than to her performance. Lesly Winyard admired her foot; Lady Boileau her eyes; Lord Gascoyne saw indescribable beauty in the delicacy of her waist; and Lord Tonnerre declared her neck to be as fine drawn and as perfect as that of a race-horse—a simile which was perhaps the only figure of speech the latter lord could have hazarded, consistently with his knowledge of any subject. These by turns approached the singer, and as they addressed her with an air of

familiar condescension, seemed in their ungentle gaze to seek an opportunity of confirming their previous judgments; which, according to the result, were signified in the presence of the persons by a look, or a whisper, to one another.

If a few ventured an observation on what they had been listening to, it was in a tone either of indiscriminate praise, founded on some one's opinion in their own circle from whose decree there was no appeal; or else, measuring things in themselves admitting not of parallel, by one another, they drew an unfair comparison between the powers of Sontag and of Pasta; just in the same way as a pseudo connoisseur would measure the merits of Paul Veronese or Tintoretto by those of Raphael.

“ I am surprised you waste so much time in this discussion,” said Mr. Ombre, who was standing near the parties debating on the latter point; “ there can be no question as to the merits of the case—Sontag is new.”

“ Is she not enchanting ?” asked Lady Tilney, addressing Lord Albert D'Esterre, who

had been listening with the utmost attention—
“quite perfection!” He smiled; “I do not know that I ever heard or saw any thing *quite perfect*; at all events, I prefer Pasta.”

“Well, you surprise me!” replied Lady Baskerville; “there is such brilliancy—such lightness, such fluency in the Sontag.”

“But there is more depth, more pathos, more poetry in Pasta. Nevertheless I admire Mademoiselle Sontag; and because I prefer one, I am not deaf to the powers of another singer—a feeling of the sublime does not exclude the lesser sense of the beautiful.”—“What a prosing, sententious popinjay; ay!” whispered Lord Baskerville to Lady Ellersby.

“But he is very handsome,” she answered.

“I know not what you ladies may esteem handsome” (and here Lord Baskerville put himself in his best possible form, and bent his cane against the ground); “but I can see nothing in that stiff conceited face and figure to call handsome; and I would not be doomed to listen to his affected pretensions for half an hour together on any condition whatever—no,

not to hear Sontag sing three songs consecutively—beautiful, charming, dear as she is!”

“Does beauty enter in at the ears?” asked Spencer Newcombe.

“Not exactly; but it goes a great way towards making what does enter there agreeable,” replied Lord Baskerville.

“What do you say, Sir Henry D’Aubigne,” addressing that celebrated artist: “is not the Sontag exceedingly lovely?”

“Indeed I have not yet had an opportunity of judging,” was Sir Henry’s discreet reply; for he gave offence to none. “There is considerable grace and play of countenance certainly; a fine-cut eye; and on the whole I should say she was a very pretty creature. But really, in this land of beauty, (looking round him as he spoke), one may be allowed to be difficult, and where there is so much to dazzle, confess oneself unable to decide.”

“Sir Henry is almost as graceful in his speech as in his portraits; I wish I were such a poet!” sighed Mr. Ombre, “and then I might hope to turn all the ladies’ hearts, for they ac-

cept your homage, but will not mine, although I never flatter."

Thus did the poet and the painter mutually pay their allotted fealties to the sovereigns of *ton*, when the whisper ran round the room that the Sontag was again about to sing.

During the performance, Lord Albert D'Esterre was standing at the back of Lady Hamlet Vernon's chair, addressing to her, at intervals, his conversation on the merits of the singer.

"I am told," said Lady Hamlet Vernon, when the music ceased, "that the Sontag is very like Lady Adeline Seymour. You will know, Lord Albert D'Esterre?" Lord Albert coloured.

"I do not see the least resemblance to my cousin;" and then he added: "I was not aware that Lady Adeline had the advantage of your acquaintance."

"I have not the pleasure of her's neither—I hear she is a most delightful person!" Lord Albert again coloured, and felt his heart beat quicker at the mention of a name so dear to him.

“Is Lady Dunmelraise expected in town this year?” continued Lady Hamlet Vernon; “I understand she has very bad health. A very intimate friend of mine, from whom I sometimes receive a letter, Mr. George Foley—you may perhaps know him—and who is at present staying at Dunmelraise, informs me that she is far from well.”

Lord Albert d’Esterre found himself irresistibly drawn towards Lady Hamlet Vernon, by the circumstance of her knowledge of Lady Adeline Seymour, and they continued for a long while in conversation—till interrupted by Lord Rainham, who, quitting the circle of the political characters of the day, with whom he had been in apparently close discussion, addressed Lady Hamlet Vernon on some other topic, and Lord Albert turned aside.

“Tell me what is your real opinion of the person you have been conversing with?” said Lord Rainham, in a low voice, while his small quick eye followed Lord Albert; “is he clever? has he talent—tact, or any other serviceable quality?”—“I hardly know how to answer in-

quiries of such depth," answered Lady Hamlet Vernon, smiling; "had you asked me if he were agreeable, I could have answered yes. But to what do your questions tend—are they general or particular; or are they political, or what?"

"Oh, I mean, is he like other people, like other young men—empty—and conceited?—or has he wherewithal to make his conversation endurable—worth listening to—point—repartee—subject—does he talk of people or of things?"

"Of both. But shall I add another to your list of inquiries—To what side of the question does he lean? Does not this sum up all you would know from me? And what if I should tell you—I know nothing about the matter?"

"Psha! well: that may be too—what *do* you think—?"

"Why I think him very handsome."

"Aye, may be so; I dare say he is—but —"

"But has he avowed his political creed? will he support your favourite measures, or oppose them? I know that is all you wish me to say," replied Lady Hamlet Vernon.

“ Why, to be sure, one judges in these days of a man’s sense a little by his politics—one learns whether he thinks at all, or follows his interests.”

“ Oh, you all do that, my dear lord. But come; I will tell you what I think of Lord Albert d’Esterre: I think he is worth winning—and—”

“ You will try,” said Lord Rainham.

“ *Fi donc!*—now I will tell you no more.” And Lady Hamlet Vernon left the foiled diplomatist to lament the failure of his mission, and learn to play his part better for the future.

The evening, or rather the night, was wearing fast away; the Sontag had sung three times, and those who had formed part of Lady Tilney’s first *soirée choisie* were soon to be left in possession only of the recollections—not the recollections—the life of the aggregate assembled there would banish such an exercise of mental powers—but in possession of the fact, that they had been of the chosen number; that they *had* heard the favourite of the hour, *not* in the too-frequented Opera, but in the privacy

of the drawing-room; and that they alone could justly, therefore, weigh her merits, and determine her defects.

In follies such as these a large portion of Lady Tilney's associates were sure to find gratification on the morrow. And it might have been well had all contented themselves with these, so comparatively harmless, although such worthless, fruits of *exclusive ton*; but it may be feared that, with some, the result of that evening, and the prospect of others to succeed it of the same kind, held out objects of a far different complexion, which a sure immunity from censure, and a complete freedom from obnoxious comparisons, successfully tended to promote.

Lord Albert d'Esterre had turned away from a group of young men with whom he had been conversing, and whose discourse, assuming a tone and character equally indelicate and revolting to his feelings, he thus endeavoured to avoid, when he found himself near Lady Boileau.

“Lord Albert d'Esterre,” she said, addressing him, “if you will excuse an invitation so

destitute of form, will you do Lord Boileau and myself the pleasure of dining with us on Saturday—I will send you a card.” Lord Albert bowed with courtesy, and expressed himself sorry that he was already engaged, and, after some conversation of little interest, as Lady Boileau’s carriage was announced, she left the room. Lesly Winyard, with the familiarity of one well acquainted, whispered in Lord Albert’s ear—

“ You have *échappéd belle* from that.”

“ What do you mean ?” asked the latter.

“ Why, I mean that you have escaped a most uncomfortable concern by just refusing the invitation to the Boileaus.”

“ I thought I heard you say to Lady Boileau but now that you would be delighted to wait upon her.”

“ Oh yes, certainly, one *says* those sort of things ; and if nothing better occurs, one *does* them ;—but it does not always follow : for instance, if any one were to ask me whom I liked better, or if you, or some equally pleasant

person, were to propose our dining together at Crockford's—"

"I am not a member of Crockford's," said Lord Albert d'Esterre, gravely.

"Oh! but your name is down, and *you* are certain of being admitted on the next ballot, and—" Lord Albert attempted to reply, but Lesly Winyard continued, "and, as I was telling you, if a pleasant dinner was prepared at Crockey's, I should, of course, not starve myself at the Boileaus."

"I confess myself at a loss to comprehend what you mean."

"Well then, some day go and try; find yourself frozen in rooms where the fire is lit only five minutes before the hour of your expected arrival—starve at the hands of the very worst cook in England,—and then, when you hear that my Lady spends twelve guineas on a new bonnet, squanders thousands on her journies to Paris, and ruins Boileau in articles for her toilette, *marvel*—but the thing is so."

"Is it possible?" Lord Albert continued

saying to himself, as the person who had been talking to him turned away, half in derision of his unsophisticated expressions and manner of receiving what he said,—“ is it possible that so much refinement of duplicity can exist, for an end so trivial—where the gratification of the spirit of falsehood, or the indulgence of an ill-bred impertinence, is the only object ?”

Whilst thus musing, and preparing to leave a scene which, as he became more acquainted with the actors, appeared little suited to his tastes or modes of thinking, he saw Lady Hamlet Vernon approach the door unattended. A recollection that she alone, in the manner she spoke of Lady Adeline Seymour, had seemed to have any sentiment in common with himself, made him move towards her, and inquire if he could be of any service in seeing her to her carriage.

“ I do not know if it is up,” was her reply, “ but perhaps you will have the goodness to ask.” He did so, and in the interval, before it was announced, they continued conversing. “ *Je vous félicite,*” said Lord Rainham, ad-

dressing Lady Hamlet Vernon in a low tone as he passed, and looking significantly at the same time at Lord Albert d'Esterre.

“There is no cause” she replied, “I am waiting for my carriage, and I think it will never come.”

“*Discrète,*” answered Lord Rainham, as he moved towards the door, and signalled what he had observed to Lesly Winyard, whose answering nod expressed concurrence in his suspicions.

It was long before Lady Hamlet Vernon's carriage arrived, and she continued talking with Lord Albert on various topics; the societies of Paris and Vienna, compared with that of London; the state of the Opera, and the prevalent bad taste of music on the Continent. She inquired for many who in their exile in this country had been known to her, and with whom, in the splendour of restored rank and fortunes, she found Lord Albert had lived on terms of close intimacy. In speaking of them he seemed to dwell with pleasure on their recollection of the services

rendered them in England, as a bright trait in the human character, which betokened feelings that it was plain to see were in accordance with his own generous and noble nature—and which had formed the basis of that familiar intercourse in which he had lived with them. Although the reverse of this picture has been ascribed to too many foreigners, who have with justice been accused of ingratitude, it ought not therefore to be recorded that all were subject to such condemnation. Lord Albert knew otherwise.

As he extolled their characters and perfections, and spoke of the charms which their society had always possessed for him, Lady Hamlet Vernon listened with increased attention, as if she would have gathered from his discourse the individual sources of that satisfaction, which he professed in so lively a manner to have found. “You are warm and enthusiastic in your eulogiums,” she said: “I hope that in England, also, you may find those whom, with the same reasons, and an equal

ardour of attachment, you will be disposed to admit to your friendship."

There was something in the tone in which these words were addressed to him, that made Lord Albert d'Esterre for a moment fix his eyes on the speaker; but they were as quickly withdrawn, when he saw Lady Hamlet Vernon blush, apparently confused, and then pluck a flower from a vase near her, while she endeavoured to hide her face by inhaling the perfume. There was an awkwardness in the pause which ensued, which neither seemed at the moment able to surmount; when fortunately Lady Hamlet Vernon's carriage was called, and as Lord Albert handed her to it, he received an invitation to her house in the evening, when Lady Tilney's *coterie* were to assemble there.

CHAPTER V.

“NEWSPAPERS”—“THE PARK.”

THE newspapers of the following morning had devoted columns to the description of Lady Borrowdale's entertainment, and the numbering of the distinguished persons assembled there; the dresses, the apartments, the decorations, the viands, and every minute arrangement, were all detailed with an accuracy which an eye-witness of the scene would readily have acknowledged, and which none but an eye-witness could possibly have succeeded in giving.

In a far less conspicuous and pretending manner, did the announcement figure in the same paper, that “Lady Tilney yesterday evening received a select circle of her friends at her house in —— Street, where the Sontag gave several specimens of her unrivalled talents.” An uninstructed reader would have been misled by

these harbingers of public events; and from the tone of the respective *affichés* feel justified in the conclusion, that the one must have been the production of Lady Borrowdale's own pen, or at least from her dictation, while the other appeared naturally as the result of that publicity, to which the actions of the great are always subjected. But this would have been far from the fact, or rather the very opposite to it; it was to the milliners, the confectioners, the musicians, the *maitre d'hotel*, and the other individuals interested in affording publicity to the dresses and entertainments of their employers, that the long and circumstantial details of Lady Borrowdale's, or any other great assembly, are to be attributed; free from any petty interference, or the gratification of a silly vanity on the part of the principals themselves.

That this was the fact, was a circumstance which could not escape Lady Tilney; and aware that such evidence, if it reached the public eye, would destroy at once all the sacredness of her select *coteries*, and the

charms of the *société choisie* which she was labouring to form, she determined on suppressing it, and issued orders, not to be disobeyed with impunity, for the effectual prevention of any announcement of whom the circle consisted of on the evening in question, and of its proceedings, with the exception that it excelled all other of the same date, by the possession of Sontag's inimitable powers. A mystery, which suited well with the ideas of Lady Tilney and of her friends on the subject of exclusive *ton*, would thus, she conceived, be thrown over their actions, and the rites of the supreme deity of fashion impenetrably veiled from the prying, inquisitive eye, and vulgar imitation of its pretending votaries.

Humility is a duty of as especial injunction in the sacred volume, as its opposite is of strict prohibition; and let it not surprise, therefore, that Lord Albert d'Esterre, young in the world's masquerade, and imbued with feelings, which if not religiously grounded, were at least, from their purity, analogous to the moral doctrine which religion teaches, should be struck,

as he perused the two paragraphs, by the apparent vanity of the one compared with the unostentatious wording of the other, and drew his inferences accordingly.

“What silly pomp in Lady Borrowdale; how unworthy her rank—how positively little, thus to set forth the splendour of her entertainment, which is worth nothing when it loses the character of being a natural consequence of her station in society. What could be more brilliant than Lady Tilney’s assembly; and yet there is no parade—no *catalogue raisonnée* of all that was seen, done, or said in her drawing-rooms—how much more like a woman of real fashion.”

Had Lord Albert d’Esterre been acquainted with the actual truth, in all probability the opinion which he passed on this trivial circumstance, as he took his breakfast, would have been the very reverse of what it was; and, however he might hold cheap any silly ostentatious display of wealth or rank, he would certainly have been more ready to overlook Lady Borrowdale’s carelessness whether her

assembly was reported accurately, or not at all, than he would have been to forgive Lady Tilney's over-anxiety and ultra *tonism* (if such a word may be coined), to screen the names and numbers of her guests, and give celebrity to the coterie by making it a matter of secrecy and of injunction to her domestics.

The mornings of Lord Albert, however, were generally passed in reflections of much more use and importance than such as newspaper subjects could furnish. During the whole of his residence abroad, his time had been employed in acquirements of a solid kind. He had studied men and things—had made himself acquainted with the constitutions, governments, resources, and political importance of all the great European states; had lived amongst their inhabitants for the purpose of acquiring that accurate knowledge of their habits and dispositions, which tends so much to a just appreciation of the line of policy to be observed towards them, and which must ever be influenced by an acquaintance with national character.

While receiving their instructions he had formed friendships with some of their most distinguished literati in all the different branches of knowledge, and had returned to England fully prepared for the commencement of that public career to which his inclination led him; and in which, amongst those who knew him intimately, and could appreciate his abilities, he was justly expected to shine.

The habit of occupation which he had formed whilst thus pursuing his studies on the Continent, did not desert Lord Albert d'Esterre, even in the noise and bustle of London society, in the midst of which he now found himself; but in the mass of business which now fell upon him in consequence of his taking possession of his large estates, in the conferences of lawyers and agents, in the answering of letters on these matters of varied interest which now occupied him, and in the attentions to those minor cases of life, the etiquettes and forms of the world, he still found leisure for serious and studious application; nor indulged in the idleness of fashion till the duties of the morning

had been performed, when alone he availed himself of them, for the purpose of relaxation and the unbending of his mind.

It was the morning after Lady Tiney's soirée, and when he had gone through his usual course of occupations, that Lord Albert recollected, with what would be called old-fashioned politeness, "the propriety of leaving his cards with the persons to whom he had been presented the preceding evening, and more particularly with Lady Tilney herself; and he determined to do so on his way to the Park. On arriving at Lady Tilney's door he was informed that she was at home (for his name was already on the list of those who had the entrée), and he was preparing to dismount when he saw the carriage of the Countess Leinsengen drive up. She bowed to him, and he was presently at the *portière* to hand her out; and offering her his arm, conducted her to Lady Tilney's boudoir. "Comment ça va-t-il chère Comtesse," said the former addressing her; "I congratulate you on possessing de acquaintance of de only polite Englishman I

have ever known—Dere is milor Albert d'Es-
terre had vraiment de galanterie to get off
his horse and conduct me from my carriage.
N'est-ce pas merveilleux in dis country !”

Lord Albert bowed to the compliment ; but
added : “ I am sure Lady Tilney will not allow
such a cruel sentence on our nation to pass
even your lips, Comtesse ; and will agree with
me, that though a few may have taken up a
false system, and assumed an air of disregard
to the courtesies of life, yet it is only such as
seek for distinction by false means, and by
doing the reverse of what others do : we can-
not, therefore, allow the censure to be general
on us all ; indeed, I do my sex but justice I
hope, when I say, that they are in this country
invariably the friends and supporters of women,
and—” “ Oh yes ; perhaps if one tumble
down, or break one's leg, or meet vid any
personal danger or affront, dis may be so ; but
dese affairs do not arise every day : and for de
little cares of de men, *les petits soins*, I never
knew one of your countrymen who knew vat
dey meant.”

Lord Albert smiled at the manner in which the argument in favour of his politeness was maintained; but perceiving Lady Tilney little inclined to keep up a conversation on the subject of national manners, he refrained from drawing the comparison, which would have been just, between a natural politeness, arising as much from feeling and imbued delicacy of sentiment, as from habit, and the mere outward forms of courtesy and etiquette, which in those most profuse of them have seldom any thing of sincerity.

“ Well, I suppose ve must go to dat tire-some Almack dis evening. You go?” said the Comtesse Leinsengen, addressing Lady Tilney; “ for my part I tink I shall viddraw my name.”

“ Oh, certainly I shall go,” replied the latter, “ for it is absolutely necessary you know, my dear Comtesse, that some of us should be there; and besides I am of opinion that as people must have something to keep them quiet, and which *they think recherché*, Almack’s is as good as any thing else, and

therefore I shall support it—In regard to *us*, I agree perfectly with you, it is *passée*, and no longer what was intended.” The Comtesse shrugged her shoulders: “You will be at Almack’s to-night,” said Lady Tilney, turning to Lord Albert D’Esterre, “although we are giving it such a bad name, will you not?”

“Your hours of admission are limited you know, and I scarcely think I can get away in time from ——”

“There is no debate of consequence, is there?” rejoined Lady Tilney with earnestness —“I may forget, but should there be, of course——”

“I did not mean from the house,” continued Lord Albert, “but I am going to dine where I shall meet Baron H.; I have known him on the continent, and his conversation is so very interesting.”—“And so very long,” added the Comtesse Leinsengen, interrupting him, and with a look which was intended to repay many discussions she had been constrained to endure at Lady Tilney’s hands; “I wonder he ever finds people to listen to him.”—“But where

do you dine," said Lady Tilney, seeming to disregard the opinion just uttered. "I know Barnette, and he is very agreeable, very clever, but I wonder he allows himself to be so *fêted* by people so little known in the world. I shall be happy, I am sure—"

"I am to meet him at the Miss D.'s," replied Lord Albert, interrupting her, and who felt that *this* was the point he was called upon to answer, and not that of who were or who were not known in Lady Tilney's estimation.

"And do you really visit them?" said the latter with great surprise, "are you not *ennuyé* to death at their parties?"

"*Ennuyé!* no—but then I must premise that I never am so under any circumstances."

"Ah, *bon!* do tell me how that is, Milor," said the Comtesse Leinsengen, "precisely, do tell me how you avoid infection from dat prevalent disease of your island, dat *bore* you call it."

"Oh, I always do what I like," replied Lord Albert with a smile.

"Cela ne fait rien à l'affaire, one do not always know vat von like."

“ I have nothing to reply to that; but for myself, if I do not find exactly what I like I always endeavour to extract entertainment from the persons or place, where, or with whom I may chance to be.”

“ Par exemple, at the Miss D.’s, what can you find at their horrible conversaciones to keep you awake,” asked Lady Tilney, “ c’est un ennui à périr, it makes me yawn to think of it.”

“ Oh, he goes to do penance for his sins, and purchase indulgence for dose to come, n’est ce pas, Milor?”

“ Neither, I assure you; I was really more entertained during a *soirée* there last week than I have been since my return to England.”

“ Ah, le beau compliment! de grâce do not avow it,” said the Comtesse.

Lady Tilney looked amazed at these opinions, like one in doubt if she had not with too much precipitation admitted an enemy within the camp, in the person of Lord Albert; and whilst canvassing the necessity of retrieving her error, by his future exclusion, and at

the same time the policy of retaining one of his interest and promise in her circle, with a view to his reform, she directed her enquiries to him in a tone almost dictatorial, as to the ground of his faith in the merits of the society he had been extolling. “Will you tell me, Lord Albert, of whom are these parties generally composed? I have yet to learn that there are distinguished individuals capable of creating such great interest apart from what is generally termed the society of London; or, I must conclude—but I will not do that hastily—that you yourself have imbibed ideas quite foreign to propriety, and have given way to associations quite unfitting your situation in the world.”

Lord Albert in his turn seemed astonished at these categories, but answered with perfect ease: “I have found at the Miss D—’s many whom I meet elsewhere and every where; but my chief attraction is the number of talented persons who are often assembled in the circle, and whose conversation affords me the greatest interest, and much instruction.”

“One do not go into society to be instructed,” said the Comtesse Leinsengen with a sneer.

“Surely not,” added Lady Tilney, “clever people are well in their way,—I mean your really learned persons—men who have read, travelled, written all their lives, but then it is in one’s own apartment in the morning that they are sufferable. I know but very few indeed, who are presentable, or who have the true talent of turning their powers to account, without torturing one to death with their learning; and then without great circumspection they become familiar, and one is obliged to take so much trouble, and be so much on one’s guard, to keep them in their place. Be assured, Lord Albert, you will find this to be the case,” continued Lady Tilney, “if you give unlimited encouragement to *gens de ce grade*—There is but one subject on which you may listen to them, I mean politics; but how few there are of the class who are enlightened enough to speak on that subject. We have, it is true, D— and B— C—, and the Count K—,

sometimes with us; and among our own countrymen, we have M— and a few others, but—”

The Countess Leinsengen’s impatience was here manifested by the usual shrug of her shoulders, and as she perceived Lady Tilney embarking on the interminable ocean of politics, turning quickly to Lord Albert she enquired,

“ But who may be de very clever persons, Milor, who give you so much amusement in dis very charming society ?”

“ Where there are so many to name, it is hard to select,” replied Lord Albert; “ but there was the great traveller, who has been further into the interior of Africa than any one has yet penetrated. His descriptions of deserts, and skies, and camels, conveyed me beside him in his pilgrimage; the trackless sands in which no insect can find subsistence; the well by which the caravan halted, the only visible friend of the traveller throughout the vast desert; the wide canopy of starry heavens, spread out above; those heavens and those stars, of whose clear brightness we in

these cloudy regions have but a faint idea ; the varied and picturesque garb of guides and guards ; the meekness of the patient camel ; the silence of the march, unless some alarm from the fierce and wandering tribes of the country disturbed its tranquillity ; and then the noise, and gesticulation, and activity, which accompanied the pitching of the tents for the night's or noon's repose, were circumstances all described and dwelt upon by the traveller, with a nervous strength and accuracy of delineation which nothing but original description can give, and which came to me with so much force and truth, and such beauty of imagery, that I thought, as he spoke, travelling was the only delightful way of passing one's life."

Lady Tilney and the Comtesse Leinsengen exchanged looks, while Lord Albert was thus giving way to the natural feelings of a mind yet untinged with the follies of fashion, and which saw no degradation to his rank in seeking and finding amusement in the society of enlightened persons.

"Tell me," at length asked Lady Tilney,

with an expression something like contempt, “had you no *changement de décoration* ; was all your talk about camels, and deserts, and wells, and stars?—“ Ah,” cried the Comtesse Leinsengen, “*avouez moi, Milor, que la nouvelle du jour vaut bien mieux.*” Lord Albert smiled, and allowed that this was amusing too in its way ; but he added,

“ We had a change of *divertissement* I assure you, after dinner ; *Il cantar che nel’ anima si sente* took the place of conversation for a time, and Mr. M—”

“ Oh he is well enough,” said Lady Tilney, “ in his place, and sings charmingly ;” (for the person in question was the Anacreon of her party, and sometimes tuned his lays to subjects on which party feeling and political animosity loved to cast derision) —“ he is well enough.”—“ And sings, do you not think,” rejoined Lord Albert, “ divinely ? I have heard others sing finely—sweetly—scientifically—even feelingly ; but such lightness, such magic bursts of imagery, such painting of sounds, I never heard but in his song.”

“And you have heard de Sontag: you heard her dis last evening?”

“Oh yes, often; I heard her at Vienna before she came to England.”

“Well, and you prefer dis little gentleman—*tout les gens sont respectables* ;” and she sneered, as if in contradiction to the words.

“Perhaps the parties will not bear a comparison,” added Lady Tilney, jealous of one whom she patronized, and whose merits she had in a measure acknowledged; and then, turning to Lord Albert, she continued—

“You must not mistake me, my dear lord; I have no objection to the *sort of thing* you have been describing. I honour talent, and delight in conversation; but then it must be on a proper footing; in circles where those persons who talk, and talk very well I dare say, should be under restraint; where they would feel themselves debarred entirely from *undue* license, and a consideration that they formed part of the society, and where they would appear in their true characters—to direct and amuse others when called upon; just as actors and singers

some upon the stage to play their parts, and then retire. Now in the circle you allude to all this necessary distinction is overthrown at once—every one there, from the nature of things, considers himself *pair et compagnon* of the company, and behaves accordingly. In small rooms—”

“ *On meurt de chaud ou de froid, par parenthèse,*” interrupted the Comtesse, who dreaded one of Lady Tilney’s long discussions; “for dere is one moment a thorough air, and de next all is shut up, and one fries vid de fire; but dat is always de case where dere is no *poêle* stove—However, adieu ma belle; I must go and leave you and Milor dere to settle all de points about dat société which he likes so much—adieu—*au revoir, Milor, je vous salue.*”

Lord Albert would have followed his natural impulse of politeness, and handed the Comtesse Leinsengen to her carriage; disposed, perhaps, also to escape further conversation with Lady Tilney on topics where they seemed to hold no ideas in common. This, however, he was not permitted to do, the Comtesse de-

clining his offered arm, saying she should never be forgiven if Lady Tilney were deprived of the triumph of converting him from his errors;—and closing the door, as she insisted on his remaining, Lord Albert was left tête-à-tête with Lady Tilney.

“Do you not think she is terribly gone off this year?” said the latter.

“I do not know if I understand you. If it be that her beauty is gone off, I should say yes—but I never heard she *was* handsome.”

“No?” asked Lady Tilney, with an expression of satisfaction; “but she is surely very *distingué* looking.”—“She has the advantage of that species of polish which the world gives,” was Lord Albert’s reply; “but this often covers an unpolished mind—and I am not sure it is the first thing I should look for.”

“I like nature as much as you can do, my dear lord; I ever stood up for that liberty and freedom attendant on persons not quite *fait au feu*; but I must confess that I like to have them a little dressed, *not perfectly raw*.”

How far Lord Albert might have found it

possible to agree with Lady Tilney in this new question, so suddenly started, it was not left him to discover; for at that moment fresh visitors were announced—and, as they entered, Lord Albert prepared to depart. Not, however, till Lady Tilney—who, spite of what she called his false theories, saw he was a person by no means to be hastily rejected—had bidden him to her box at the Opera on Saturday evening. “I am determined to be at the rising of the curtain,” she said, “to hear the Sontag—only it is so difficult to be in time. Were you ever in time in your life?”—

“Yes, I have,” answered Lord Albert, smiling.

“Then be at the very *premier congé d’arche* on Saturday,” added Lady Tilney, as he bowed to her and left the apartment; glad to have gotten over a visit of ceremony, where, from the tone of conversation which had passed, he augured that little in future would be found consonant to his ideas or his tastes.

As he rode from the door, Lord Albert turned his horse towards the Park. It was

one of the first Spring days that had shone in the early year, and all the gayest of London seemed hastening to enjoy its genial influence.—Yes, even the weary and the *blazé* in life's crooked paths appeared for a moment to acknowledge the charm which the brilliancy of the scene and the brightness of the atmosphere combined to form. Smiles were in every face and cheerfulness in every movement.

Than the throng of Hyde Park there is perhaps no promenade in Europe more dazzling; none where more magnificence of equipage, or more beauty of human form is displayed; and it is difficult for the young, and the handsome more particularly, not to feel intoxicated as they enter on a stage where the whole appearance is so fair, and where a consciousness of personal charms assures them they must themselves shine.—It is not probable that Lord Albert d'Esterre, philosophical as he has just appeared while discoursing with Lady Tilney, was altogether free from feelings so natural to his years, or from that species of vanity which seeks a display of personal beauty, or whatever other quality may best glitter in such a scene.

He was young, strikingly handsome, possessing a form of perfect symmetry, and moreover one of the finest horsemen of his time. What wonder then if, as he sought the crowded road of the Park, something like self-love had a share in the direction which he took, and the choice made of the spot where he might breathe the balmy air of such a day. As he joined some of his acquaintances in the Ride, and stopped to speak to others, passing from right to left and from north to south in the gay and splendid crowd, his recollections were naturally turned to similar parades in other countries, and he felt pride as an Englishman in considering how far our national display of beauty and of wealth outshone that of other capitals.

“Neither Vienna, nor Paris, nor St. Petersburg, can rival this, Glenmore,” he said, in the buoyancy of his gratification at the scene—“nothing that we ever beheld there is comparable with this—now is it?”

“You have chosen your day well,” replied the latter, “because, if it had been one of those three hundred and sixty-five days of mist

which we generally enjoy in this metropolis, I should be disposed to dispute the point with you, and set the sunshine of a Parisian Spring against the brilliancy of our ladies' eyes and the splendour of their retinues. And would you not agree with me?"

"Why, as a mere animal, I might, perhaps—climate does affect our *physique*, I will allow; but the national pride—"

"Oh, bah! my dear d'Esterre your national pride in this instance has nothing to do with the matter;—and if the belles of Paris, or Vienna, or the Calmuck beauties of St. Petersburg, could rival ours, their horses and coach-makers surpass what you see before you, and their summers be eternal, your *amour de la patrie*, I fear, would not long continue to bias your judgment. No, no, d'Esterre, that feeling does not live on food like this; but we have other and better sources for it, as you well know and feel."

Lord Albert's face shewed, in the generous glow which suffused it, a sense of his friend's appreciation of his sounder judgment; but he

added, with a smile, “if you will not allow my present admiration to proceed from such a noble spring, at least do not accuse me of a reverse of sentiment, if I draw a comparison, in another respect, not at all favourable to my countrymen. Do you observe that line of men drawn up in battle array, and with impertinent nonchalance passing judgment on the women who drive before them? It must, or ought to be, at least, offensive to the pride and delicacy of the former; it would shock any European, and is a custom more suited to eastern despotism, and to the rules of an Asiatic slave mart, than to a civilized nation.”

“But do you conclude, therefore, that the men are alone to blame in this?” asked Lord Glenmore; “and is it to be presumed that they would have forgotten the courtesies and respect due from them, if women in general had been more true to the delicacies and decencies of their own sex. Do justice to the men while you blame the practice of the day, and acknowledge, that if the nod, or motion of the hand, or impertinent glance of recognition

now takes place of the bow and respectful salutation of other times, yet that there must have been a sufferance of the change, if not an encouragement of it, and an equal alteration of manners on the other hand, or it would never have been."

"I dare say you are right, Glenmore; and if so the more the pity. But although custom sanctions all change in reciprocal demeanour between men and women, yet because the stiff and *manière* address of the last century was laid aside with the silk coat, and bag-wig, and sword, I do not see why courtly manners should have been exiled at the same time. So long as society is to exist on a proper footing, there must be an outward shew of proper feelings; and when all deference in minor points ceases, it is quite certain that all consideration of respect in more serious matters will cease too." — "What is that I hear?" cried Lesly Winyard, riding up to Lord Glenmore's side, and nodding familiarly to his companion; — "what is that I hear about proper feelings, and all consideration of respect? You are not moralizing in Hyde Park I hope."

“ D’Esterre says that you men do very wrong to sit on your horses, rank and file, and let the ladies parade before you ; and I think what he says is true.”

“ Indeed !” replied Mr. Lesly Winyard, and looking round in Lord Albert d’Esterre’s face with a sneer, “ I believe if we were not to do so, you would have very few beauties to admire in your ride,—the women only come here to see us.”—“ And what do *you* come for ?” asked Lord Glenmore smiling.—“ Oh, to shew ourselves, certainly : to *be* admired.” Before he could reply to the insufferable impertinence of this speech—if indeed he would have deemed it worthy any reply—an equipage caught the eye of Lord Glenmore as it entered the gate, and putting spurs to his horse he was at its side in a moment and speaking to the ladies in it. “ Whose carriage is that ?” asked Lord Albert of Lesly Winyard, who continued to saunter his horse in company with him.

“ It’s the Melcombe’s,” he replied, after a pause, and having put the handle of his whip, which contained a glass, to his eye—“ it’s the

Melcombe's: Georgina is a d—d fine girl. Don't you know Georgina? they say Glenmore is smitten,—I'll go and see the fun;" and, with these words, this model of the gallantry of the nineteenth century rode off. "What can he mean," said Lord Albert to himself, "by calling any woman familiarly by her name in that manner, unless she be his sister or near relative; but to me, a stranger almost to himself, and to the party utterly unknown, what abominable vulgarity, what detestable insolence!"

There is no saying how far Lord Albert might have gone on in his animadversions on the manners of his sex, if he had been left quite to himself, for there was enough around him, and before his eyes, to provoke remark even in a mind less alive to the niceties and decorum of polished life. But his attention was called another way, and he in turn was to become a subject of flip-pant ridicule; to be set down as a person *à prétension*, by the young men whose manners he had very justly condemned, and who chose to attribute to coxcombry and to affectation, a de-

meanour and a bearing which they had not the power to imitate.

A graceful inclination of the head from some lady passing in the throng, and whose feathers waved in unison with the movement, as she bowed to Lord Albert, caught his eye. He gazed for a moment, not recognizing the party, but lifted his hat courteously from his head, and as he looked back to ascertain better who it was, perceived the carriage had stopped near the gate. Turning his horse, therefore, he rode in the direction, and discovered that it was Lady Hamlet Vernon who had saluted him. He approached the carriage, with all the air and gallantry of a really high bred person; thanked Lady Hamlet Vernon for the honour she had done him, in recognizing him in the crowd; apologized for his own blindness, and continued for some minutes in conversation with her on the beauty and gaiety of the scene, and on the current topics of the day. His back was turned at the time to the phalanx of horsemen, whose ranks, and avowed occupation, had given occasion to his remarks on the bad manners of the

age; and who now, assembled in closer body by the gate, were ready to give their last glance of scrutiny or recognition to the departing carriages.

“That’s a fine horse that man is upon,” said Lord Tonnerre, pointing to Lord Albert; “who the devil is he?”

“Oh! its d’Esterre,” said Lesly Winyard, “do you not know him a mile off, by all his bows and grimaces: for me, I could ‘wind him i’ the lobby, any where.’”

“Damn the fellow, what business has he with such a horse—can he ride?”

“I should think not,” drawled out Lord Baskerville; “he is the most conceited animal London has boasted for some centuries. I heard him talk last night about that dear Sontag, till I was sick.”—“And, my lords and gentlemen,” said Lesly Winyard, in mock solemnity, “he talked not only most fancifully, as my Lord Baskerville avers, last night, but on this morning too: and upon what? Divine, O ye augurs! declare it, ye soothsayers!—Why he discovered, in the very age and body of the

time—its forms and its complexion, and pronounced our manners, rude; our bearing, unlike gentlemen; our noble array here, barbaric and uncivilized;—in short, [assuming his natural tone] he is a d—d puppy. I caught him, but now, preaching in this strain to Glenmore, who, like a fool, said he agreed with him!—A general murmur burst from the circle which had listened to Lesly Winyard, and the words coxcomb, ass, puppy, poppinjay, and jackanapes, issued simultaneously from the lips of these polished ultras of ton.

Lord Tonnerre alone was silent, but his features shewed him to be as little in a mood for gentleness as any of them. When having grasped his rein, and put his horse on his haunches, he glanced a look of intelligence to those around him, and was off at full speed towards the spot where Lord Albert, leaning from his horse, was still conversing with Lady Hamlet Vernon. Regardless of courtesy, or the consequences of his impetuosity, he kept his violent course till within half a neck of the carriage, and then suddenly endeavoured to wheel round,

and pass on the other side. Lord Albert's horse, startled at this close and sudden approach, plunged, and alarmed at the carriages and noise, became, for a moment, unmanageable, and broke away. His rider's admirable dexterity and coolness, however, soon enabled him to rein in this movement, and return towards the spot from which he had started, and where his pre-occupation had prevented his observing that a crowd of horsemen had gathered, who partially stood round, or were dismounting, seemingly to assist in some accident. He moved at a quicker pace, and found that Lord Tonnerre's horse, on being so roughly checked, had reared, and fallen back on his rider.

Lord Albert was on his feet in an instant, and making his way through the throng was as eager in his inquiries, and prompt to render assistance to the sufferer, as if he had been personally interested in him. He found, however, no serious mischief had occurred. Lord Tonnerre, with the exception of having been stunned with the fall, and not yet able to rise, seemed perfectly himself, and careless of what had happened.

His first inquiries were for his horse; and having been assured by several of his friends that no injury had been sustained in that quarter, he swore loudly against the animal for a fault which had been entirely his own, gave way to the most violent gesticulations of angry passion against the curiosity (as he called it) of the by-standers, and so disgusted Lord Albert d'Esterre by his want of proper feeling under an accident that might have ended fatally, that the latter mounted his horse once more, rode round to the other side of Lady Hamlet Vernon's carriage to assure her that she need be under no apprehension for Lord Tonnerre's safety, and continuing by her side as she proceeded out of the Park, left the actors of this paltry scene to bear their discomfiture as they best could.

CHAPTER VI.

“ THE OPERA.”

IT is not to be supposed that Lady Tilney should keep a determination formed fully one hundred and forty-four hours before the season of its fulfilment, or retain on the Saturday evening the same degree of passionate admiration of the Sontag's powers, which she had expressed on the previous Wednesday to Lord Albert d'Esterre, when announcing her intention of being present at the first scene of the Opera. She did, however, reach the house, on the evening in question, before the conclusion of the third act, and found the Comtesse Leinsengen already in her box.

“ Eh bien, ma chere, à la fin vous voilà ! have you been ever since at dat tiresome dinner ?”

“ Oh no ; I drove home immediately after you went away ; but I had a thousand things of consequence to do, and could not positively arrive sooner. Amongst other things there was a

great enormous card of invitation from the d'Hermantons. It is quite out of the question *my* going: and I think the affair ought to be overturned as much as possible—our cause should be established without offence directly given, but decidedly; and if we are engaged elsewhere, you know, our excuse of '*exceedingly sorry*' will always effect this, and save us, in the present instance, from the extensive and moral acquaintances of the Duchess, and from the *fadeur* of her evenings. I would myself send out cards did I not think it would be too marked; but some of us might do so. There is Lady de Chère, I see, in her box; would you arrange the business with her to night in the room—Do you *agrée* with me, my dear Comtesse?" Her friend nodded assent; and in her abrupt rough voice said, "N'ayez pas peur! I can always hold up my head and tread *down de plebe*—we are used to dat; but for you, I fear in dis country, you do not understand de matter."—

"You know, my dear Comtesse, I have often explained to you, that our constitution—"

“ Oh ! trève de politiques I implore,” said the Comtesse Leinsengen, turning her head away, and looking towards the stage : “ trève de politiques je n’en puis plus ; but fiez vous en à moi.”—

“ I am surely the last person you ought to suspect unequal to that task ! It is quite unjust to me, dear Comtesse ! Have you forgotten the woman whom Lady Ellersby and myself thought we could use ? whom we actually paraded for a season, maintained she was a beauty, and a person ‘ qui feroit fureur ;’ and after all, when she failed, left her planté in the midst of the promised honours ; actually ejected her from Almack’s, and if we met, walked over her as a person whose face we had never seen !— Was not this carried with a proper spirit ?”

“ Yes, under my suggestion ; but I could have told you from de first that her *grand nigaud de mari* would be always *à ses trouses*, and prevent her being of the least service to us. It is quite a mistake to attempt such a measure, *ça sent le roman*, and I do hate all romance—Dat young milor, (vat you name

him?) dat was at your house de oder morning, Lor—Lor Albert d'Esterre; I don't think, upon my word, never I don't, dat he will do us any good, I have my doubts dat he is only *un espion*, and—" Whilst the Comtesse was speaking, the door of the box opened, and there entered, with an air of affected refinement, a person whose appearance ill suited with his outward show of courtliness—his face was red and large, with grey eyes, his hair inclining to flaxen, and his whole figure round and ill-formed.

This physiognomy, however, if Sir William Temple would have allowed himself to be natural, was an index to his disposition, for he was *au fond* good-natured; but an overweening vanity—a desire to be fine, and be considered one of the beau-monde, had spoilt the man, and he became insufferably pompous and conceited—in proportion as his exertions in good dinners *in* the season, a good country house *out* of it, and a vote in parliament, made him successful in obtaining the notice of people of rank, and of the minis-

ter. The first thought his cook good, his chateau, at an easy distance from London, convenient—and the last, remembering the old woman's adage, considered that every little helped, and that Sir William's vote, so long as it was on the right side, was as good as any other. He had made his way thus far with tolerable facility, but his ambition grew by feeding on, and was only to be satisfied by the attainment of the highest distinction of the *ton* of the day; such as in his estimate was conferred by the protecting smile of Lady Tilney, the Comtesse Leinsengen, and others of that *élite* body.

No opportunity therefore was lost, no pains omitted to arrive at this desirable end, and to improve the recognition with which Sir William found himself at times honoured, into what should at least *appear* a footing of intimacy. An opera box was an outwork more easy to be taken by a *coup de main*, than a lodgment effected in the citadel itself; and while unregistered on the favoured list of the *entré* at Lady Tilney's mansion, the access to

her circle in the public theatre, which was not denied him, appeared a license of the utmost importance, and one which he was the last man to let grow obsolete by neglect of usage, or forget to turn to profit.

“Has not the Sontag outdone herself to night, Lady Tilney?” asked Sir William as he entered the box.”

“Yes, never was there such a singer—I have been listening till my very ears ache with intense attention.”

“I am so glad, Lady Tilney, to hear you say so, for I have been disputing the point with Lord Albert d’Esterre, who maintains that the Sontag’s singing is not in the first style, and a great deal more of the same sort; but he might as well endeavour to persuade me that Ude is inferior to Doveton’s present man Mariné. I think Lord Albert d’Esterre wishes to be thought an oracle, and the superior judge of all judges, and that without his decree there can be no perfection.”

“*Vraiment,*” said the Comtesse with a shrug of her shoulders, “I think Milor might

suspend his judgments till he heard if people cared for dem."

"Ah, how delighted I am Comtesse to hear you say so," cried Sir William, repeating the words he had first addressed to Lady Tilney, and which indeed he addressed to every one of *ton*, let what might be the subject, or the sense that fell from them.

"*Vraiment!*" again came drily from the lips of Comtesse Leinsengen, accompanied with a look at the speaker, which told him that the contempt conveyed in that expression, when speaking of Lord Albert, attached equally to himself. Fully understanding the intended meaning, and conscious that with the Comtesse Leinsengen he had made much less way than with Lady Tilney, he turned once more to the latter, and addressed her on a subject by which he knew well he should pay his court successfully.

"You were not at Lady Borrowdale's the other night. You never saw such a set as were assembled there; positively there was no stirring without coming in contact with peo-

ple whom one had never seen before—and then it is such bad taste to collect such a crowd—for my part, I got away after the first glance at the affair.” Lady Tilney smiled, and Sir William, encouraged, continued, “Do you dine at Doveton’s?”

“I believe so.”

“I am delighted to hear you say so. Lord Osbalston asked me for the same day—but Mariné, you know, lives with Doveton now, and he could always turn the scale with me” (laughing affectedly); “*Apropos*, might I venture to ask the honour of your partaking of my rustic fare? I am living, you know, quite *en garçon*; but it would be a variety, so different from all you meet elsewhere; so very plain, and so very humble; and you would of course do me the honour to name your own party. Might I hope that you too, Comtesse, would condescend so far?”

This was the boldest step Sir William Temple had yet taken; and he stood in proportionate anxiety, breathless and red, awaiting a reply which was to confirm or crush his hopes.

May be, like a second Cæsar, he felt that he had crossed the limits of the empire, and saw that victory only could retrieve what he had hazarded, and that he must rise or fall by that. If victory did attend him, then, like another Alexander, he might weep for fresh worlds to conquer; but if he fell,—“oh! what a fall was there, my friends!” Such feelings, no doubt, did agitate his swelling breast when he saw the interchange of looks pass between Lady Tilney and her friend, as if they questioned each other.

“Shall we gratify this man? (this fool he would have read, could he have interpreted the Countess Leinsengen’s expression): “shall we countenance him?” and in the tremendous moment of suspense Sir William blest his stars that there were none by to mark him. But when the joyful sound of Lady Tilney’s voice pronounced an acceptance of his petition, he would have given every thing, short of the promised honour itself, that the whole Opera house had been present to witness his triumph. “You will receive us *en garçon*, Sir William,

dat will be very good," said the Comtesse Leinsengen: "all I bargain for is dat there should be no misses—dose unmarried women are always in de way."

Sir William was too much intoxicated with joy—too much absorbed with the prospect of his increasing consequence in the eyes of the fashionable world, when it should be announced that he had entertained the Comtesse Leinsengen, Lady Tilney, and a party of distinguished personages to dinner, at his house in May Fair, to pay attention to any thing not immediately connected with the results which that dinner would produce. He had heard not one word distinctly beyond the promised acceptance of his invitation; although he continued mechanically to reply, whenever he imagined himself addressed. "I am so glad to hear you say so!—I am delighted to hear that!" At last, on recovering a little, he perceived that Lady Tilney and her friend had entered into an argument on the subject of the unmarried ladies, to whom the Comtesse had

alluded, and in which his dinner seemed entirely forgotten, or likely to be so.

“Dey are always tinking of settlements, and jewels, and have nothing to do but take notice of what oders are doing,” rejoined the Comtesse Leinsengen, in her most thrilling tone: “Our way is much de better dan yours; we marry our children at once, or put them in de convents: dat settles de matter, and make dem much happier too.”

“I am not quite so sure of that point, my dear Comtesse,” said Lady Tilney, “although I own ladies are bores; but we manage the thing in *our* way, and as well at least: we let them *seem* to please themselves, which is half the battle towards making them satisfied with the lot they draw, and we ourselves direct the entire *marche du jeu*. You know I am for liberty in all things; liberty of choice as well as conscience; but very young people do not know what they wish and it is only when a little acquainted with the world that any body can be said to have a

choice." Sir William Temple remained in torture during this discussion, and more than once wished all the unmarried ladies in London, who thus seemed to step in between himself and fortune, at the bottom of the sea. At length, tired, but not convinced, Lady Tilney left her opponent in the middle of a sentence, and turning to the unhappy Sir William, asked, "for what day shall I make our party at your house?"

"I am delighted to hear you say that!" was the prompt and very sincere answer of the person addressed. "Oh, any day you do me the honour to appoint."

"Dat dinner of your's, Sir William, oh vraiment je me fais fête d'y penser," cried the Comtesse Leinsengen, turning abruptly round to him, and determined that her rival in argument should not have even that subject entirely her own.

"I hate vaiting and puts off; we vill fix de day at once—vat say you to Sunday? to-morrow—de Sunday is always frightful dull in

your country; 'tis the only day, besides, in which I am disengaged."

"I'm so glad to hear you say so," replied Sir William, "let it be to-morrow," turning at the same time with a look of inquiry to Lady Tilney.

"Oh, after church there is no objection to diverting one's-self innocently; it is impossible to read and pray all day: besides I like to make the Sunday, on principle, a gay, cheerful day."

At this moment Lord Albert d'Esterre entered. "Shall I ask him for to-morrow?" eagerly whispered Sir William into Lady Tilney's ear; afraid lest the subject nearest his heart should again be usurped by some other topic.

"Yes—no—yes, you may;" replied Lady Tilney; whose answer in the affirmative was decided by her wish to know more of Lord Albert in society, and a little also by Comtesse Leinsengen's having held cheap her penetration in regard to the qualifications of the for-

mer for their *société choisie*. The invitation was quickly given, and no excuse would be admitted. While Lord Albert was endeavouring to extricate himself from this importunity, and Sir William to convince him of the impossibility of disobeying Lady Tilney's commands, which he advanced to strengthen his cause, the Comtesse Leinsengen caught the conversation :

“ So, Milor, you will not be at de party tomorrow ? an excuse vraitment ! when de people make *me excuse*, I know what dat means, and it is made up in my mind never to ask dem again.”

“ When you have once expressed that horrible sentence,” answered Lord Albert, smiling, “ it would surely be impossible to incur so great a danger ; but as I am really not able to give my assent to the very obliging invitation, I shall not, I hope, be deemed deserving of the penalty.”

“ What ! *then* you will *not* accept ?” asked the Comtesse Leinsengen again, in her own abrupt tone of command.

“ No; I lament I cannot.” The Comtesse shrugged her shoulders, adding :

“ What! you will not accept, I suppose, because it is Sunday; and you are engaged all de day long to de Church; is it not dat — are you what dey call a saint?” Lord Albert felt annoyed by the importunity with which he had been assailed; and conceiving, according to his own ideas of good breeding, that declining an invitation at first was sufficient, he continued to look more grave and annoyed. Still as the Comtesse repeated the question :

“ Are you what dey call a saint?”

“ No, a sinner certainly; but would I were indeed a saint.”

“ So den you condemn us all, I suppose, who do not keep de Sunday stupidly *à la façon Angloise*? Will you tell me now, Milor, vat you tink one may do on a Sunday? I suppose you would not hang your cat, *par exemple*, if she killed her mouse on Sunday, would you?”

Lord Albert d’Esterre looked still more

cold and grave, as he drew himself up and leant against the back of the box, saying, that “it was an unfitting time and place for such discussions, and that he begged to be excused from entering upon them.” Then bending forward to Lady Tilney, who had remained silent, and saying a few words to her, he bowed and retired.

“Il est farouche et fanfaron au possible,” cried the Comtesse Leinsengen, as he closed the door; “after to-night I have done vid him.”

“He is only original; and it will be a great thing to soften h’s little prejudices, and teach him to enjoy existence under your tuition, if it were possible,” said Sir William, making as low a bow as his *embonpoint* would permit, “‘to soften knotted oaks, and bend the rocks,’ it would be done—”

Lady Tilney smiled at the mis-quotation, while the Comtesse Leinsengen added in a tone of impatience: “but Miladi, do vat she vill, cannot make a bore agreeable; but, ah!” turning round, “dere is Milor Basker-

ville, how glad I am to have something humanized to talk to! Milor, we have just had a saint in our box; do you not smell de odour of sanctity very strong?"

"I am at a loss to know your meaning, Comtesse—pray explain;" and when she did so, he replied; "Hem! from the first moment I saw him, I suspected that stiff unnatural sort of manner had something sinister, (hem!) I hope I am not worse than my neighbours, (hem!) but whenever I hear any thing approaching to cant (hem!) I fly from it, (hem!) as I would from all that I hold most detestable; (hem!) besides, since his conduct to Tonnerre, I have considered him (hem!) hardly in the light of a gentleman. (hem!) You heard, Comtesse, did you not, of that affair? (hem!)"

"No, vat *affaire* you speak of?"

"Oh, you know he nearly caused Tonnerre a most serious accident, and (hem!) his favourite horse Chester, it is feared, is entirely ruined."

"No, I never heard one word of it, vat was

it for?"—"Why, Tonnerre (hem!) was riding up gently to speak (hem!) to Lady Hamlet Vernon in the Park, (hem!) my Lord Albert d'Esterre, who was by her carriage, (hem!) chose to turn his horse short round, and to shew his horsemanship, spurred the animal, who plunged and kicked, and (hem!) Tonnerre's horse was driven against the carriage and reared, and fell back—(hem!) and—"

"And what did de oder Milor do—did he tumble off?"

"Yes, (hem!) at least I believe he did, but I don't know—we were all so engaged, (hem!) in assisting Tonnerre—the last I saw of him was his horse going through the Park Gate like a shot, for he can't ride."

"Baskerville," interrupted Lord Glenmore, who had entered the box, and, while talking with Lady Tilney, had overheard the latter part of this veracious history, — "Baskerville, you must pardon me if I correct your statement a little. *You* may have *heard* the circumstances only related, *I saw* them — and if ever a man deserved having his

neck broke, and losing a favourite horse, it was Tonnerre. I never witnessed any thing like the manner in which he rode, not *to* Lady Hamlet Vernon's carriage, *but at* d'Esterre, and if the latter had not been the excellent horseman he is, I think there might have been more serious results accruing to both than actually happened. However, Tonnerre and his horse are quite well, for I met both to-day." Lord Baskerville had a mode of dropping the corners of his mouth, raising his chin, and turning up his eyes, whenever he wished to shew signs of contempt; but too discreet to offend a person of Lord Glenmore's calibre, he managed to suppress them in some measure; and having heard out what Lord Glenmore had to say, turned without answering him to the Comtesse Leinsengen.

"Do not talk more about dat man, I pray you, I am tired to death of his name," said the latter; "but tell me, Milor, vill you and Miladi Baskerville meet me to-morrow at dinner? Miladi Tilney and myself are going to

do Sir William dere de honour to dine vid him, and vid our own party."

Lord Baskerville looked amazed, and before he could recover his surprise, Sir William himself seemingly confirmed the strange announcement, by facing round and assuring *Baskerville*, as he called him, on the strength of many a good dinner before, that "he should be delighted to see him; and Lady Baskerville too, I hope will confer the same honour upon me as these ladies." Lord Baskerville, ere he answered, directed a look of inquiry to the Comtesse Leinsengen, to ascertain if the matter were really serious.— "Oh, you must come vid me," said the Comtesse, "I positively vill have no excuse."

"I am ever ready to obey your commands, Comtesse, you know, and—"

"I am delighted to hear you say so," cried Sir William. (Lord Baskerville drew up.) "And Lady Baskerville?" continued the former.

"Hem! *I cannot answer for Lady Baskerville, Sir William—but (hem! hem!) I will*

certainly inform her of the invitation, and (hem!) should she have no other engagement, (hem!) doubtless she will be most happy, and (hem!) will wait upon you; (hem!) but dear me the Opera is ended," looking at his watch, and turning to Lady Tilney. "Oh those tiresome bishops—really I wish people would not meddle with what (hem!) they have nothing to do,—we are always now deprived of half our ballet on the Saturdays." (hem!)

"*C'est vraiment ridicule,*" murmured the Comtesse Leinsengen: "dere is no country in de world where dis sort of foolish ting takes place but in England."

"It is rather an infringement upon our liberties, I will allow," observed Lady Tilney, "to turn us out of our Opera boxes at a particular hour."

"Liberty—liberty—dat liberty of the subject is all a farce, chere Miladi; it is all a make believe, as I often have de honour of telling you. Lord Baskerville, vill you be so obliging—my schall."

Lady Tilney, however, would not suffer the

Comtesse to go till she had spoken to her again on the subject of their *soirée* at Lady de Chere's. "The Duchess of Hermanton's night will be a very good opportunity," she said, "to let the world know that we do not mingle in societies of the kind; all the regulars, as they consider themselves, look upon d'Hermanton House as head-quarters, and make a point of attending like subalterns gaping for promotion; and if we are there it will have the worst possible effect. Then again, such as we choose to invite to Lady de Chere's, will understand what is meant, *sans nous compromettre*, and hold off in future from engagements like the d'Hermanton's. You know it would be unwise and impolitic to impart our intentions to all indiscriminately who compose our circle; but we must at the same time afford some guide for conduct. If we do as I propose the affair will be very well understood, without our being unpleasantly involved, and the system will answer well, *n'êtes vous pas de mon avis, chere Comtesse?*" — "Peût-être qu'oui," was the Comtesse's answer, accompanied by the habitual shrug of the

shoulders; "and," continued Lady Tilney, "I think there was every one at my house the other night who ought to be invited. Shall I send Lady de Chere my list?"

"I will see about dat; but first we must know if Miladi vil do as we wish. *Laissez-moi faire, j'arrangerai tout ça,*" and taking Lord Baskerville's arm, she was leaving the box—

"But what shall we do about dat dinner to-morrow, chere Miladi?" she added in a lower tone to Lady Tilney.

"Oh go, by all means; he is well enough—will be so pleased that we may do henceforth as we like with him, and it allows others to hope for the same honour."

"Vell, den, I vill go—remember Milor you are engaged to me to-morrow." Lord Baskerville made one of his most refined bows. "And who else shall we have?" asked the Comtesse of Lady Tilney.

"Oh! I don't know; there are the Boileaus and Lord Gascoyne, and Prince Luttermanne, and Lord Tonnerre."

"Dose vill do very well; I vill tell dem if

I see dem in de room. Adieu, chere Miladi. Ve shall dine vid you to-morrow, Sir William," she added as she left the box.

"I am delighted to hear you say so!" replied the happy Sir William Temple.

"May this be true!—O may it—can it be;—Is it by any wonder possible?" whispered Spencer Newcombe, who had heard the Comtesse Leinsengen's last words, and now approached Sir William with affected surprise.

"Come, my master; if so, the great ones shall not have you all to themselves," he continued: "I too will dine with you to-morrow. Lady Tilney, are you of the party?"

"Yes."

"Why, where is the sign now? have ye e'er a calendar—where's the sign, trow you?" Spencer continued saying.

"The what?" asked Sir William.

"The sign—Believe me there's a most secret power in that! Court any woman in the right sign, Sir William, as you have done, and you shall not miss."

"I am delighted to hear you say so!" replied Sir William.

“ I believe he thinks you allude to the signpost of an inn,” whispered Lord Boileau, who had joined the party, “ and it suits well enough to a dinner-giving man like him.” Lady Tilney now prepared to leave the box ; and taking the arm of the Duke of Mercington, was followed by all the men who had paid their visit and their court to her.

Sir William seemed to look with pride on the world behind him, as he mingled in the crowd ; conscious of the mark of fashion which would from the morrow be emblazoned on his brow ; and in the hurry of the throng, and in the quiet of his pillow, the glory of his future success and progress alike presented itself to him that night in a thousand forms.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DINNER.

WHEN Lord Baskerville announced to Lady Baskerville the names of those who composed Sir William Temple's dinner party, she was sufficiently astonished; but felt there could be no compromise in being present, and at once accepted his invitation. The affair being considered rather in the light of a party to Richmond, or some similar gaiety, several of the guests went together. Prince Luttermanne attended Lady Tilney; the Boileaus joined Lady Hamlet Vernon; and Lord Baskerville engaged his friend Lord Tonnerre to accompany himself and Lady Baskerville.

As the carriage of the latter proceeded down — street, they passed the church at the moment when Lord Albert D'Esterre was leaving the door, after evening service. Lady Baskerville's quick eye immediately recognized

him, although mingled in a crowd of those denominated the common people; and pointing him out to Lord Tonnerre, the latter asked, in his usual tone of command,

“ What can *he* be doing in that crowd?”

“ Isn't it Sunday?” rejoined Lord Baskerville, yawning. “ He has been, I suppose, (hem!) to some conventicle. (hem!)”

“ Yes, he looks like one of those d—d Methodists, who would ring people to church from morning to night, by G—;” (Lord Tonnerre forgot that swearing was no longer a fashionable vice) “ they ought to be scouted from society.”

“ True,” replied Lord Baskerville, “ I think (hem!) that it would do a great deal of good to society, if (hem!) they were all run up, *à la lanterne*.”

“ Ay, hang them—hang them as high as you can see,” continued Lord Tonnerre; “ rid the land of them any how. There's my father—I wish *he* had them for once in his hands; there's not a stricter person on earth than my father; he'll suffer no immorality,

he'll have no profligacy in the family; but if one of these canting rascals was ever known to cross his door, or to be found on his estates, he'd make short work with him—he'd send him away with marks which the fellow would carry to his grave,—by G— would he. All this comes, however, from the manner in which we pass our Sundays. I hate foreigners and all their d—d ways; but they act more sensibly than we do in regard to Sunday: they let the people amuse themselves after church. It's right to go to church, and all that,—that I'll allow; but I am sure the common people would be much better afterwards with what is fitting for them, quoits, or nine-holes, or cricket, or something to busy them with, instead of going to Methodist meetings, where they turn saints, merely because they have no better amusement; unless, indeed, it be the alehouse."

"And there get drunk," remarked Lady Baskerville; "that would be vastly better, vastly more moral. When you and Baskerville rule the state, things will be much better

managed, no doubt." This was said half sneeringly; for Lady Baskerville for some reason was not in very good humour.

"Hem!" rejoined Lord Baskerville; "I must beg your Ladyship would limit what you say to yourself. It is (hem!) a liberty I *never* take *with you*, to say what you *would* or would *not* do (hem!)" Upon this a silence ensued in the trio; when a few minutes broke the awkwardness occasioned by it, and they found themselves arrived at Sir William Temple's door.

Lord Tonnerre offered his arm to Lady Baskerville as they alighted; while Lord Baskerville, to avoid the unfashionable appearance of entering the room with his wife, stopped, seemingly for the purpose of giving orders to his servants, till such time as he imagined he could walk in alone. There were arrived of the party only Lady Tilney and Prince Lutermanne. Lord Baskerville, having made his bow, retired to a sofa, discomposed at finding that the Comtesse Leinsengen, on whose appearance he had staked the whole of his con-

sequence, and the excuse of his presence, was not yet come. Lord Tonnerre too, displeased that Sir William Temple continued to occupy Lady Baskerville with the profusion of his acknowledgments for the honour done him, and that Lady Tilney appeared too much engaged to notice any one, stood for some moments in gloomy silence, when at length Lord Somerton entered.

“How d’ye do, Somerton?—glad to see you,” was Sir William’s salutation to his guest, as he held out a finger to him, and continued talking to Lady Baskerville.

“Tonnerre,” said Lord Somerton, turning away from this brief reception with a degree of contempt; “come aside, I have something to tell you;” when a deep discussion on matters interesting and intelligible to the former seemed to ensue, since it was productive of a partial relaxation of the scowl which generally characterized his face when he felt himself, as in the present instance, overlooked, or when subjects indifferent to him, or above his comprehension, were alluded to.

Lady Tilney, hitherto absorbed in her conversation with Prince Luttermanne, now looked up, and addressing Lady Baskerville with an air of protection, invited her to come and take the seat next to her. "What a vastly pretty cap you have on!—do tell me where you got it; and, my dear Lady Baskerville, if you have nothing better to do, pray don't forget to come to me to-morrow night. Have you seen any thing of Lord Albert D'Esterre to-day? What do *you* think of him? *I* can hardly understand him yet; sometimes I think one thing, sometimes another. They say he is a Methodist—how extraordinary! if he was not young, or not handsome, or not *d'une bonne tournure*, one might suppose such a thing; but as it is I don't believe it—do you?"

"I have not seen enough of him to judge," was the cautious reply (for Lady Baskerville could be cautious where so deep a stake was at hazard as fashionable consideration); "but I think he rather affects singularity."

"Perhaps so; but then you know he will soon correct that fault when he has lived a

little longer amongst us. I have heard that he is engaged to be married;—do you know if it is true?”

“ I did hear,” said Lady Baskerville, “ something about a Lady Adeline Seymour, a cousin of his who has been brought up in the shades, and is said to be a world’s wonder of beauty, and purity, and perfection; but the engagement was an affair of the papa’s and mamma’s, and probably the parties themselves will hate each other in consequence.”

At this moment the Comtesse Leinsengen was announced, and then followed Lord and Lady Boileau, Lady Hamlet Vernon, Mr. Spencer Newcombe, and Lord Gascoigne, each received with that portion and kind of welcome which marked a well-studied knowledge of Debrett on the part of Sir William Temple, who felt himself the deity of the day, and who, complimentary, facetious, pompous, *affaire*, and familiar by turns, according to the *calibre* of the person he addressed, moved about the apartments like some presiding Joss or Amsterdam Cupid. The whole party were at

length assembled, the dinner announced, and the company withdrew to enjoy the very best *artiste's* best efforts, put forth on an occasion so replete with honour and distinction to his *employé*. Lord Baskerville contrived to place himself next to the Comtesse Leinsengen, whose hand, in her *qualité d'ambadrice*, the master of the feast had shewn his skill in precedence by soliciting, as he led the way to the dining-room; a circumstance, by the way, fortunate for him on his *début*, for although Lord Baskerville's arm would have been far more agreeable, yet the Comtesse would never have pardoned such a neglect of her grade in favour of her dear friend Lady Tilney.

Of the other arrangements of the party it would be unnecessary to speak, and equally useless to catalogue the dinner itself. It is known to all that in London, after the first few weeks of the season, every one's table who gives a dinner is covered in exactly the same way—there may be degrees of excellence in the flavour and science of the dishes; but the things themselves are, as the Geneva traveller said of

travelling, “ *toujours la même chose, toutes les villes sont les mêmes, vous avez des maisons à droite et des maisons à gauche—et la rue au milieu—c’est toujours la même chose.*”

It is true there are certain critical periods in a spring season, in which nature’s fruits, still immatured, are brought to perfection by the fostering hand of man ; and on these the deep and skilful in gastronomy will seize as apt occasions for a display of superior taste and refinement ; then, and then only is it, as is well known, that cucumbers are lawful, green peas to be suffered, and strawberries and peaches tolerated ; but beyond this there is even yet another point—“ a grace beyond the reach of art”—the very North Pole of elegance—the paradox, it may be called, of the gastronomic system—it is to display these productions when positively they are not to be got. Happy the man who so succeeds—thrice happy Sir William, that on this day the stars so ordered it, that while London was yet innocent of cucumbers or peas, you should be profuse of both ;—that when

peaches and strawberries had not so much as crossed the thoughts of the most refined, they too in abundance graced your board. Oh! happy consummation of those honours, which from the last evening seemed about to centre round your head, and raise you to the pinnacle of gastronomy and of *ton*. During the first moments of all dinners a very few monosyllables are uttered—a sort of murmuring conversation then ensues between the parties nearest each other,—till at last one individual more gifted or more hardy than the rest hazards a remark across the table, and the talking becomes general.

It was Lady Tilney who on the present occasion broke the monotony of those half-audible sounds that whispered round the table. “Lord Gascoigne,” she said aloud, “I hope you are really going to put down that vile newspaper, The —, it is a disgrace to London.”

“I should have thought that you, Lady Tilney, would rather have upheld a paper of

its principles, and which affords such a proof of what you always profess to have so much at heart—the liberty of the press.”

“ You must pardon me, it has nothing to do with the liberty of the press,—but a great deal with its abuse,—besides, the liberty of the press applies only to politics—not to private affairs.”

“ *C'est selon,*” replied Lord Gascoigne with provoking suavity of manner; “ if we publish ourselves what we do, we court public remark.”

“ She cannot forget or forgive,” whispered Spencer Newcombe to Lord Baskerville, “ that she herself was once the target at which some of the severest shots of this paper were sent.”

“ How?” asked the latter.

“ Why, when, for party's sake, she was once about to take a step.....I cannot tell you about it now—some other time,” he added, as he turned to Lady Boileau, who had asked the same question of him thrice.

“ Publish ourselves! my dear Lord,” continued Lady Tilney to Lord Gascoigne, “ why we never do that if our actions attract notice from our situation.”

“They should be more looked to,” was the reply of the latter, interrupting her; “if there is nothing to censure, the satirist’s occupation is gone.”

“Vraiment Milor treats de subject en moraliste, and as if himself vas a paragon of excellence dat could not err. Pray, Milor, do you always tink so wisely on vat you do, dat you never do nothing wrong yourself?”

“Oh, do wrong—yes a thousand times a day, Comtesse,—but when I do, I do not quarrel with the world because it will not think me right, nor if it call me a fool or a knave, am I angry—for perhaps it is a truth—at any rate, other and better men than I have been called the same.”

“It is an execrable paper,” said Lady Tilney; “and ought to be burnt by the hangman.”

“It is an abominable ting,” said the Comtesse Leinsengen, and would not be suffered in any country but England.”—Lady Tilney would have interrupted her, but the Comtesse was bent on proceeding: “I repeat, as I have often had de honor to tell you, dat de English

are a people of contradictions; dey talk always of dere great *purité*,—dere *virtue*—and den suffer so quietly all dose vile tings to be said of dem in de public prints.” Lord Gascoigne, who did not care one straw what was said either of himself or any one else, perceiving he had sufficiently fanned the growing indignation of Lady Tilney by his apparent callousness to public attack, for a moment remained silent, amused to hear the topic discussed in other hands. Lady Tilney loved argument, and for its sake often adopted opinions which at other times she would as strongly have opposed.

“If the things alluded to *are done*,” she continued, addressing herself to the Comtesse Leinsengen, “they are *better told*—I always like every thing to be told.”

“Vid de exception always, ma chere amie, of vat concerns one’s-self,” replied the Comtesse sharply.

“But I deny that there is any truth,” rejoined Lady Tilney, not appearing to notice this last remark; “I deny that there is any truth in any thing that comes through such

an abominable channel as that paper; all its remarks are the offspring of impertinent malice or envious vulgarity, and all its facts, falsehoods.”

“Hem!” said Lord Baskerville, in his slowest and most imposing tone, “these things have always been, Lady Tilney, and always will be. Some satirist or other, (hem!) has always lived since the Flood, from Lycophron down to our own day, to lash the vice and follies of the age, as *they* say; but in fact to indulge that spleen which is common to the canaille at all periods. And after all, what does it signify? Nobody thinks about any thing that is said of any body—hem!—nine days after it is said—hem!”

“If I ever saw *my* name in that d—d paper,” exclaimed Lord Tonnerre, while his brow was knit in tremendous frowns, “if ever allusion were made to me—the writer should eat his words.”

“My dear Tonnerre,” rejoined Lord Gascoigne, once more taking up the conversation, “you would find he has an ostrich’s stomach. But why should such a toy trouble you?”

“ By G—, the writer shall suffer,” replied Lord Tonnerre, furiously, “ he shall suffer—he shall pay—”

“ Who,” asked Lady Boileau quietly, “ who shall pay?”

“ The scoundrel—the — who has dared to use my name,” answered Lord Tonnerre, after several efforts at utterance, which his passion for some moments impeded.

“ But you must discover *who* is the *who*,” replied Lord Gascoigne, with provoking calmness of manner.—“ Junius himself was never hid so successfully as is this writer. You will find it fencing in the dark, Tonnerre, if you meddle with him.—But I see you are angry; now take my advice, when you are so use this antidote—it is an excellent rule I learned from my grandfather—repeat your alphabet; and that being done, your anger will be over too.” Lord Tonnerre’s face moved convulsively in every muscle, and his whole frame seemed to writhe under the words of Lord Gascoigne.

“He boils like a pot,” whispered Spencer Newcombe.

“Oh, do not vex him, pray,” said Lady Baskerville; “he is *only nervous*.”

“Mad, mad!” rejoined Lord Gascoigne, “pray take heed.” With many hems and ha’s, Sir William Temple remarked, that for his part he thought it cruel to delight in mischief; that to him it always appeared a most uncharitable practice to wound another’s feelings—and somewhat rude too; fit only for the vulgar.

“The pleasure or amusement,” he continued, “of saying ill-natured things is quite beyond my comprehension—quite inconceivable. I remember, when I used to live a good deal at D—House, there was a rule established that no one should notice, remark, or seem to observe what was passing;—it was considered so very vulgar to interfere with other people’s affairs—all were left at large without account or question—and the consequence was, there never was any thing so en-

chanting since the world began as that society—so *suave*, so equal, so gentle, so serene;—not a voice ever heard louder than a whisper—every one so well amused, every one so well employed, that *ennui* was unknown. There never was any thing to compare to that society.”

“*De graces!*” exclaimed the Comtesse Leinsengen,” as Sir William concluded this effusion of his reminiscences, “*de graces!* do not tell us, Sir Villiam, of *vat vas*: to talk of *tings* gone being delightful is like telling a woman who is *passée*, ‘I remember when you were so admired.’ De ting to talk of is *to-day*.”

“Oh, of course,” rejoined Sir William, taking the Comtesse’s last words *au pied de la lettre*, “of course the society of to-day--the society *here*—is *par excellence*, the most delightful in the world.” A nod here passed between Spencer Newcombe and Lord Gascoigne, indicative of Sir William having escaped from his blunders with more adroitness than they had given him credit for; and at the same moment the ladies rose to depart.

“*Vraiment,*” exclaimed the Comtesse Lein-

sengen, as she entered the drawing-rooms, “ I do tink, as we are de deities of dis fête, ces messieurs might for once have broken through dere abominable customs, and accompanied us; but dat terrible Lord Somerton and dat young milor Tonnerre would tink, I suppose, de constitution in danger, if dey did not remain at de table after de ladies.—I vonder, Miladi Baskerville, comme Milor est votre élève, dat you do not teach him better.”

“ Dear Comtesse, not I, I assure you—it is quite enough to take care of one’s-self; I never interfere with other people’s affairs—nothing would induce me to undertake any body’s education.”

“ I believe you are very wise,” said Lady Boileau; “ the *laissez faire* and the *laissez aller* is the best rule.”

“ I do not quite agree with you in that,” said Lady Tilney; “ how could we have a pleasant or a distinguished society if that system was allowed to prevail? how could we —”

“ La! what sinifies dat?” said the Comtesse

Leinsengen, as she arranged her *bérin* at the glass; “*Vos milliners ne valent rien*—I have just sent to Paris, and then I shall have a *coiffure* that will not be so hideous.”

“Did you observe the Duchesse d’Herman-ton’s last dress?” asked Lady Baskerville; “she did think it was perfection; one feather on the top of another, flower upon flower, flounce upon flounce, jewel upon jewel, till she was one mass of moving millinery—I never saw such a figure since the days of Lady Aveling’s ambassadress’ glory.”

“Vat sinifie vat dose women do? D’ailleurs les Angloises ont toujours singé les modes.” In this, and similar conversation, passed the hour of separation in the drawing-rooms, while at the dinner-table the subject of discussion possessed as little interest as is generally found in society so constituted.

“Baskerville, Boileau, Gascoigne,” said Sir William Temple, as he resumed his chair after the departure of the ladies, “will you not come up, and in the short absence we are doomed to suffer from our fair companions,

let us find comfort in this poor earthly Nectar?" (Sir William believed his wines to be the best in creation.) "Baskerville, what wine do you take?"

"Claret," was the reply of the latter, accompanied by a look of surprise which seemed to say, "of course."—"Did you ever hear such a question!" he added in an under-tone to Lord Boileau.

"Never—he might as well have asked if one would try Chambertin after *Truites à l'Aurore*, or *Clos de Voguet* after *Bécasses à la Luculle!*" rejoined Lord Baskerville.

"Fools were made for jests to men of sense," whispered Spencer Newcomb, "and I know of no one who affords more amusement than my friend there, Sir William."

"How officious and *affaire* he was in contriving this party," said Lord Gascoigne.

"And how puzzled, lame, and lost in prosecuting it!" rejoined the other.

"He is a most substantial ass," said Lord Baskerville.

"Tonnerre," asked Sir William at the

moment, and affecting to vary the theme, according to the taste of the person, "Do you know which is the favourite for the Derby?"

"Gad, he turns his words as many ways as a lathe," whispered Lord Gascoigne again—"understands all subjects alike, and is as learned as the occult philosopher of Hudibras."

"And as much renowned for profound and solid stupidity," rejoined the latter. A laugh escaped at these words; and as their "ha! ha! ha!" passed round, Sir William laughed louder.

"Very good that, Spencer, I just caught the end of it—the point is always in the tail you know."

"He caught it," said Lord Gascoigne, repeating the words, and looking at Spencer Newcomb; "do you think he did?"

"If it was with his mouth, he might certainly—for it is large enough to catch any thing—and he is welcome; I give him my jest for his dinner, it is the only return I ever make."

"And you thrive on your bargain generally, Spencer, I should suppose."

“ How long do you think I took from Penzance to town ?” said Lord Tonnerre aloud ; and without waiting for any reply added,— “ Eighteen hours by —, and in hack chaises too, changing every stage.”

“ *I do not conceive it much to do,*” rejoined Lord Baskerville. “ I remember, (hem !) once leaving town seven hours after the mail ; and though I had rips of horses, I arrived, (hem !) at twenty minutes before his Majesty’s stage coach, (hem !)”

“ Well,” said Lord Gascoigne, “ well, Basky, that is excellent,— ha ! ha ! ha ! that is excellent,— ha ! ha ! ha !” The abbreviation of his patronymic was always distasteful to Lord Baskerville, and on this occasion he not only felt his dignity compromised by the license of Lord Gascoigne’s address, but was himself offended by the covert suspicion conveyed of the substantiality of the fact he had related ; turning therefore away with an air of contempt, he addressed himself to another of the party. Lord Gascoigne, however, was not so easily to be silenced, and exchang-

ing looks with those who had watched the scene, added, with very provoking calmness,

“ Basky, you were not offended, I hope, with any thing I said, I meant only —”

“ Not at all,” replied Lord Baskerville, the corners of his mouth dropping in the exact angle of scorn by which, as a mathematical man of *ton*, he would have described his contempt of the speaker,—“ not at all, Gascoigne; I beg you won’t think of it;”—and he turned again to the party with whom he was conversing.

“ Beat—beat, Gascoigne,” exclaimed Spencer Newcomb. — Lord Baskerville looked around with a dignified air, and for a moment silence ensued, not however without a wink passing from Spencer Newcomb, implying that they had gone as far as was advisable. But Lord Gascoigne was not to be stopped without a farewell shot, as he added, “ Well, Baskerville, we start at eight, and breakfast at nine, is it not so?” The latter again tried to look grave, but obliged at length in self-defence to join in the laugh

which followed these words, he let fall for an instant the mask that too often covered his most trivial actions, and appeared the good-hearted good-humoured creature nature had made him.

“Somerton,” said Sir William Temple, breaking the subject of conversation, “do you remember when you were at my chateau in the north?”

“Yes,” was the dry reply he received from one who, though he eat his dinners, held him in the most sovereign disdain, and this “yes” sounded harshly on the ears of Sir William, living as he did in the praises bestowed on his establishments, and never losing an opportunity of referring to the subject of them; nor was he less annoyed, as he observed a whisper pass between his northern guest and Lord Tonnerre, to whom Lord Somerton had turned after his very short and laconic reply, and added,

“The fellow had one covey of partridges, two dozen of Burgundy, and a mistress; I made love to the one, drank the other, killed the third, and then quitted.”

“ Good,” said Spencer Newcomb, who had overheard what passed; “ he would have pardoned you, however, the first, if you had praised the others.”

“ No doubt he would,” replied Lord Somerton, “ but on my conscience I could not do it, and I presume he feels this as well as myself, for I shall make him give me a dinner the first day in the week I am disengaged.” Thus fared Sir William Temple in the hands of those for whom he had lavished, and *incessantly* lavished, an expense which, if properly directed, would have rendered him an amiable, respectable, and happy individual. As it was, he spent his money on objects despicable in themselves, and for persons absolutely turning him into ridicule while enjoying his bounty.

The party from the dining-table soon after arose, some having attained the object for which alone they came, the enjoyment of a dinner; others who had yet a further motive, ascended to the drawing-rooms, and after passing there sufficient time to complete arrangements, arrange departures, and fix dry points

that needed discussion for the morrow's amusement or occupation, took their departure also, leaving Sir William Temple to feed on the empty honour which remained to him, of having entertained in his house in May-fair so distinguished a party; none of whom, however, beyond the dinner-living Lord Somerton, Spencer Newcomb, and one or two lordlings, ever intended to think more of him for the future.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONTRAST.

ON the evening of Sir William Temple's dinner-party, the invitation to which Lord Albert had declined, he retired at an early hour to his study; and having closed his door, he sat some minutes with his head reclining on his hands, endeavouring to shut out the frivolous insignificances of many late past evenings, and to recal those of a very different description and tendency.

A sweet and silvery tone of feeling analogous to a fine Wilson that hung opposite to his writing-table, shed a serene, self-satisfying sensation over his mind; it might be a false complacency, yet complacency for the time being it was—and he opened his writing-box, in the lid of which was a portrait. This portrait represented a very youthful girl intently busied in copying a

bust, the likeness of himself. A flush passed over his countenance, his eyes sparkled, and a genuine sensation of rapture thrilled through his heart, as he said,

“ Oh ! how superior to all I now see around me—young, innocent, intelligent, the dignity of human nature is here ! Gazing at this image, I can never err ; it would recal me to the path of rectitude were I ever so inclined to swerve from it.” At that moment a letter caught his attention ; it was still unanswered—again he coloured, for it had remained so since the preceding morning ; and such a letter ! Now with an eagerness that would have redeemed the slight, he actually kissed the opened page ; and previous to replying to it, re-perused the following contents of

LADY ADELINE SEYMOUR'S LETTER.

“ I think it a long time, dearest Albert, since I have heard from you. But then you are so busy, and have so many things to do ; whereas I have nothing to do, but to count up minutes, days, and hours ; yet this is so wrong, that I

blame myself even for thinking, much more for writing the thought; and would blot out the dissatisfied words, but that I promised you should know truly, and without disguise, what really passed in my mind.

“ After what I heard good Mr. Adams preach last Sunday, how dare I wish to hurry on time, when I make so poor a use of it? Indeed, dear Albert, when I think seriously, I do not wish it; but when I feel that we are parted, and yield to that feeling, why then I am a wayward creature. Does not this prove, my dear Albert, how cautiously we ought to look into our hearts, since out of them are the issues of life? I will do so; I will try to do so, if God will help me; for it is only by this watching that I shall render myself at all worthy of you. Mamma said to me the other day :

“ ‘ My dear love, remember that marriage is a state necessarily imposing many duties, and accumulating many cares; this in its happiest instances must ever be the case; it is wisely ordered that it should be so. But it is

a state honoured by God and man, and opens upon a wide field for self-improvement. If entered upon in this view, it brings with its pains many delights and consolations, both for this world and the next; but if it is engaged in rashly, merely for the purpose of running a more unchecked career, or for the unworthy purposes of aggrandizement in rank and fortune apart from nobler views, it never fails to produce disappointment, and it may be, disgust of life and endless misery.'

“ What a terrible picture, my Albert! But I cannot conceive it possible that any body should marry from any motive but attachment, and therefore I can hardly persuade myself that any of these awful consequences are likely to attend on marriage; only my Bible shews me the insufficiency of all mere mortal trusts; and Mamma, I know, never says what she does not think is true; therefore I must try and prepare myself for becoming such a wife to you as will secure our mutual felicity. The little book we exchanged on the day you left us, I read morning and evening, and as soon as

it is finished I begin it again ; so when you are reading yours, you may be certain we are pronouncing the same words, thinking the same thoughts, lifting up our hearts together to the God who made us.

“ How thankful we ought to be for good books ; are they not messengers from heaven ? And yet how we slight them. Often, when engaged in my morning’s duty of reading, my wandering mind turns so frequently to drawing, to music, or any other exercise, that at length I have punished myself by determining not to have recourse to these recreations till I can moderate my ardour for them, and enjoy them only as recreations ; they *ought not* to be more—all beyond is idolatry. I have of late, too, engaged myself in active duties among the poor around our neighbourhood ; and my rides to their different habitations give me such additional health and spirits, that I am always ready to laugh at all Mr. Foley’s silly jokes. My heart is so light, and I feel so happy—I see no end to all the diverting things I have in view, and some day or another when, please

God, I am really your wife, all the schemes I form for the benefit of those within the circle of my influence will be fully realized.

“ What an extended sphere of usefulness will then be mine, and oh ! my Albert ! what an awful responsibility too will then attach to my situation ! I pray daily that I may be enabled to meet it as I ought. What I grudge most is, the time which I am now frequently forced to lose, in being civil to our dull neighbours here; and I do confess that to sit amused by Miss Grimsdale’s side, while she talks over the last county ball, or to listen to old Lady Henniker’s history of her ménage with becoming patience, is a trial for which no self-complacency in the idea, that I am making a sacrifice to oblige others, does in any degree compensate. But Mamma smiles when she hears me answering *tout a rebours*, and sees my fingers entangling the silks, and tells me afterwards that we are not to live to ourselves, and that in fact to please others, when not neglecting any positive duty, is a minor virtue. I am sure she is right—but, dear Albert,

I feel on such occasions how difficult it is to be good! Mr. Foley, to whom I expressed myself thus the other day, told me, 'I talked a great deal of nonsense, though I was a very charming person altogether,' and ended by asking me seriously—'What wrong I thought it possible I could do, living as I did? How ignorant he must be of the state of the human heart, not to know that our best efforts are faulty, our purest actions imperfect! I stared at him, and then attempted to explain to him that all our thoughts, words, and actions, are marked with inherent error. He stared at me in return, and, looking at me incredulously, asked 'do you really mean what you say?'

" 'Most assuredly,' I replied; 'can any one mean otherwise?' Then he looked very grave indeed, sighed heavily, and said, 'it was a sad thing to see one so fair and young imbued with such false ideas—ideas which in the end would make me wretched.' I laughed, as I assured him that it was he that was deceived, and who would be wretched; that as for my-

self, I was the gayest, happiest creature upon earth; and all I had to dread was, loving the world too well, and seeing it in too fair a light. I had not a corner of my heart, I said, unoccupied, or a minute in the day unemployed; and besides that, my reliance upon God made me feel as if I never could be perfectly unhappy under any circumstances.

“ But no sooner were these words uttered, than my heart smote me, for I thought of *you*, dear Albert, and suddenly a cloud seemed to pass over me, and my deceitful heart sickened at the thought of the possibility of losing you; and then I knew how ill I was prepared to yield that perfect obedience which we are called upon to yield to the will of heaven.—I believe my countenance betrayed somewhat of this self-condemning spirit, for Mr. Foley quickly asked, whilst fixing his searching eyes on mine, ‘ What, is there *nothing* which could make you miserable?’ and I trembled, and blushed, and felt a tear of shame rise in my eye, as I answered :

“ ‘ Perhaps I deceive myself, and think of

myself too highly. Perhaps—in short—at all events, I know that I am *trying* so to feel, and so to think.’ He laughed contemptuously, saying:

“ ‘I guessed how it was—poor Lady Adeline! this false system is spreading fearfully indeed! What could he mean? Mamma told me on my repeating to her this conversation, ‘that to many persons Mr. Foley would be a dangerous man; but not to you, my child; and I have a love for that wayward creature, the son of the dearest friend I ever possessed, which makes me incline to overlook his faults, and hope that he will amend them. Who knows but the mode of life we lead may be the means of sowing some good seed in his heart? However, my dear child, encourage not his conversation on such points.’ I believe Mamma is right, for notwithstanding my dislike of his irreligious tenets, he is so well-informed, and so very diverting, that I cannot help being entertained by him. And in many respects I assure you, Albert, he is a good man, and general report bespeaks him such. He is

very charitable; is kind to people in distress; and goes regularly to church, when he is with us—is not all this very unaccountable with his strange way of talking to me? I do not understand it, and indeed it is not worth thinking much about, one way or the other. Write to me, dear Albert, and tell me what your opinion is upon this subject. I wish in all things to conform to your wishes, and to model my opinion on yours: for I well know your excellent principles and unerring judgment. To-morrow, I allow myself to return to the delight of copying your dear bust, ‘*O che festa!*’—Sometimes (I am almost ashamed of telling you) I divert myself with putting my caps and hats on it, and please myself with the idea that it is very like *me*—do not laugh and call me ‘foolish child!’ Now I dislike that *you* should call me child; remember the day you receive this I shall be seventeen, so put on all your gravity and consider me with due respect.

“ The menagerie is thriving; I visit our pets every day, and you will find them in fine

condition when you return,—when will that be? I wish the time were come, don't you? Good night, good night, for there is no end to this writing. I must end. Again good night. Dearest Albert, I am, heart and soul, your own

“ ADELINE SEYMOUR.”

“ Sweet, pure Adeline!” cried Lord Albert, “ how shall I answer this letter.” He seized a pen, and in the first glow of fondness and admiration, which such a letter and such a portrait before him inspired, he filled two pages, not less tender or sincere than those which had been addressed to himself: when he was suddenly disturbed by hearing a bustle and violent clattering of horses in the street, and at the same time the voices of some of his own servants. This increasing, he rang the bell to inquire the cause, and no one answering, he at length opened the door of an apartment and called to the porter, asking what was the matter? He was answered, that a carriage had been overturned opposite his door, and it was wished to bring the lady who

had suffered from the accident into his Lordship's house.

“ By all means, immediately,” Lord Albert exclaimed; “ afford every assistance possible;” and in a few instants a lady was borne in by two domestics. She was immediately placed, apparently insensible, on a couch in an adjoining apartment. The female attendants were summoned to her aid, and Lord Albert himself supported her head on his breast: “ Good heavens !” he exclaimed, “ it is Lady Hamlet Vernon ! Send off directly for Doctor Meynell.” A stream of blood flowed over her face, and in order to ascertain where she was wounded it was necessary to let down her hair, which fell in glossy masses over her neck and shoulders. The glass of the carriage window, against which Lady Hamlet Vernon had fallen, was the cause of the catastrophe; and though the injury was not found to be dangerous, the wound had been sufficiently severe to occasion a suffusion of blood. The physician soon arrived, and having examined the extent of the evil, applied remedies

and administered restoratives to the terrified Lady Hamlet Vernon, who was shortly after restored to her senses, and enabled to explain the cause of her having met with so dangerous an accident.

“ She was returning,” she said, “ from Sir William Temple’s dinner-party, when her coachman, whom she supposed was intoxicated, drove furiously, and the carriage coming in contact with the curb-stone at the corner of the street, overturned, was dashed with violence against the pavement, and broken to pieces.” This account was corroborated by her footmen, who had miraculously escaped unhurt. Lady Hamlet then expressed her thanks at having received such prompt and kind assistance, and Doctor Meynell having pronounced it as his opinion, that if she remained quiet for a few days, she would find no disagreeable effects result from the accident, and that she might with safety be removed to her own house, Lord Albert’s carriage was ordered to convey her thither. “ I am happy, indeed, to think it is thus,” said Lord Albert; “ and

that I have been of the least use is most gratifying to me."

This adventure, related in a few words, occupied an hour or more in its actual occurrence; and Lord Albert had had leisure to remark the symmetry of form and feature for which Lady Hamlet Vernon had been so long celebrated. He might have beheld Lady Hamlet for ever, rouged and dressed in public, and have passed her by unnoticed; but when he beheld her pale, dishevelled, in pain, and dependent on him at the moment for relief, he thought her exquisitely fair, and there entered a degree of romantic illusion in this accident which roused his fancy, while her sufferings touched the friendly feelings of his nature.

As he assisted her to her carriage, they passed through the room where he had been sitting previous to her arrival; the candles were still burning, and his papers lay in confusion around, the writing-box was open, in the lid of which was the portrait of Lady Adeline. Lady Hamlet Vernon pausing, complained of

a momentary feeling of faintness, and threw herself on a chair close to the writing-table; her eyes in an instant were rivetted on the picture, and at the same moment Lord Albert's hand closed it from her view. There was nothing that demanded secrecy in his possessing Lady Adeline's picture. His engagement to his cousin was generally known, and his having her portrait, therefore, was no offence against propriety; but every body who has loved will understand the feeling, that the sacredness of their heart's affections is broken in upon, if an indifferent or casual eye rest upon a treasure of the kind. Lady Hamlet Vernon spoke not, but her looks testified what they had seen; while he remained confused, and seemed glad when she proposed moving again to the carriage.

“I am afraid,” she said, her voice trembling as she spoke, “I am afraid my accident has been the occasion of breaking in upon your retirement, and disturbing you out of a most delightful reverie. I shall regret this the more

if it makes you hate me altogether—but the fault was not mine.”

“Hate you! Lady Hamlet Vernon—hatred and Lady Hamlet Vernon are two words that cannot by any accident be connected together.”

“Ah! would that your words were as true as they are courteous,” she replied mournfully; “but courtesies, alas! *imply* an interest that they do not mean. Do not, however, let me detain you, Lord Albert; it rains”— As he still lingered at the door of the carriage, which they had reached, and in which she now entered, he added, “You will at least give me leave to enquire for you to-morrow?” which was all he had time to say, as the carriage was driven rapidly away.

Lord Albert returned to his room, with a confusion of images chasing each other in such quick succession through his mind, that though he resumed his pen to finish his letter to Lady Adeline, he found it difficult to do so; and he was conscious that the few words which he added were in such a different tone, and so

little in keeping with the previous part, that he finished abruptly, and, folding and sealing his letter, closed the box that contained the miniature, and throwing himself back in his chair, mused in vacancy of thought till slumber was overpowering him. Without once adverting to Lady Adeline's book, he hastened to lose in sleep the feeling of dissatisfaction which had so suddenly possessed him.

On the following morning, when Lady Hamlet Vernon arose, feeling little of the accident of the preceding evening, and having taken particular pains with her toilette, she cast a glance of complacency at her reflected image in the mirror, and, descending to her boudoir, placed herself on a sofa, spread with embroidered cushions, folded a velvet *couvre-pied* over her feet, ordered a table stored with books to be placed within her reach, on which also rested a guitar and a vase of flowers, and gave way to a train of reflections and feelings unaccountably called up by the occurrences of the previous evening. Lady Hamlet Vernon was a person who had read, and did read, at

times; but in the present instance, when calling for her books, she intended no farther use of them beyond casual allusion to their contents, and what their appearance might avail to give an interest in regard to herself.

She lay with her arm resting on a pillow, and her ears attentively listening to every cabriolet that passed, eagerly anticipating a visit from Lord Albert. She twice looked at her watch; once she struck it, to know if its sound answered to the hour its hand designated.—“Surely,” she said, with some impatience, “he must at least inquire for me?—and it is late—late for a person of Lord Albert’s early habit—it is really three o’clock.” At that moment a short decided knock at the door roused her attention. Her hand was on the bell in an instant, lest the servants might deny her—but in another the door opened, and *not* Lord Albert, but the pale and melancholy Frank Ombre entered. The revulsion from pleasure to disappointment occasioned by the appearance of this visitor, and which displayed itself in Lady Hamlet Vernon’s features, was inge-

niously ascribed by her to a sudden pain in her head, the consequence, she said, of her accident the preceding night; which accident she hastened to detail, and was gratified by the homage of regrets, most poetically expressed by Mr. Ombre, who remarked that the danger of this occurrence was transferred from herself to her admirers.

“The beautiful languor which it has cast over your person has produced a varied charm more inimical to our peace than even the lightning of your eyes. What a fortunate man that Lord Albert was, to be on the very spot to render you assistance! There are some persons, as we all know, who are born felicitous—they please without caring to please; they render services without thinking what they are doing, or even being interested in reality about the persons whom they serve; they are reckoned handsome without one regularly beautiful feature, and pronounced clever, superior, talented, without ever doing any thing to prove it. But in that, perhaps, lies their wisdom—

one may be *every thing* so long as one never proves one's-self *nothing*."

" True, there are such people in the world, I believe; but do you really mean to say"—(and she almost blushed.)

" I never mean, or can mean, to say any thing that is disagreeable to you".....

" Oh, it is not I who am interested in what he *is*, or is *not*; but, to confess the truth, a very dear friend of mine, a charming young person, takes an interest in him, and I should like to know if he is worthy of that interest before her affections are further engaged."

" Ah! my dear Lady Hamlet Vernon," replied Mr. Ombre, " there is nobody like you—I always said so. You know *I never flatter*; but you are so disinterested, always thinking about other people, always so kindly busy where you can be of any use; so unlike the world in general, in short, that it quite spoils one for living in it."

" Well, this is a point we shall not dispute about, my dear Mr. Ombre, only tell me what

you know of Lord Albert D'Esterre? what are his tastes, his habits, his pursuits, his politics?"

“Of himself I can tell you little; with his father I was very intimate long ago, and I believe, somehow or other, people do always contrive to be like either father or mother, some time or another in their life. Of the father I could tell you, that there did not exist a more polished or high-bred man, a term which you know is not always justly applicable to persons of high rank; one very well versed in literature too, at least for the peerage in that day, and so long as he continued in public life, no one acted more to the general satisfaction of people than my Lord Tresyllian. Of the mother there is little to say, except that she was—nay is, for aught I know to the contrary—a very good sort of person; who was never known to make any noise, save once, in her life, and that certainly was not on a judicious occasion, for it was when the famous Bellina, the dancer, was *attachée* to the suite of her husband during his embassy at ——. Then

indeed Lady Tresyllian did make some very unadvised stir, and contrived that the whole court should remark upon the subject; but her husband, who was the most polite man in the world, as I have said before, represented to her the inutility of such conduct, pointed out how such a lady, and such a one, conducted herself in similar situations; stated that these sort of things always happened, and were only unpleasant when they were injudiciously managed, and in short the affair was amicably adjusted; an affair which happened so long ago, that it is only some old chroniclers like myself who have any recollection of it.

“After Lord Tresyllian’s return to England, he continued to fill several official situations as long as his friends, or his party rather, as those are called who contrive to hang together for some interest,—their own or their country’s, it matters not—continued in office—and on their retiring, his Lordship retired also: I suppose to preserve his consistency, or because his talents were not needed in the new arrangement. Since then, gout and disappointed ambition

have contributed to make him a recluse from the busy world of fashion; and in the magnificence of his princely fortune, and in the society of a chosen few, who have shared his fate, or depended on his interest in their political career, his existence is now passed, settling the balance of Europe in his closet, opposing his Majesty's ministers (as long as they shall not include his own party) in the senate, and on every other occasion, and haranguing every assembly of disappointed patriots in his own county, of which he is lord lieutenant.

“ Of Lord Tresyllian's patriotism I presume none doubt—of his judgment and good taste in politics, from the last-mentioned fact, while holding his present situation, perhaps there may be some question. But he has considerable parliamentary interest, and will therefore always have some who will think all he says or does right. His eldest son Osberton we all know follows in his father's line of opposition; glad, I dare say, to be saved the trouble of acting or thinking for himself. I need not

tell you more of him—in short, there is nothing to tell, but his party. What Lord Albert D’Esterre’s will be, remains to be proved; I mean in the only way people think a man’s being any thing is of consequence, namely the part he will take in public life. He inherits wealth from Lady Tresyllian, and so far will be independent of his father; but he is too young, I should think, to escape the toils that will be laid for a young member, and therefore we shall soon see him engaged on one side or the other, as a tool of party. By the bye, what says Lady Tilney of him for that?” Here another knock announced another arrival, and Mr. Ombre rose to depart.

“Pray, my dear Mr. Ombre, do not run away; I should be so delighted if you would stay and help to keep the conversation alive, I am too weak to do any thing but listen. Indeed my poor head tells me that I ought not to do that.”

“I would not stay a moment longer on any account—not for the world,” was Mr. Ombre’s reply, gently pressing her extended hand; “I

am sure I have talked too much already. Lord Albert D'Esterre," (for it was he who entered), "I request you will not be so agreeable as you usually are, for our fair friend feels the effect of her accident last night; and I am sure she ought not to be amused, unless being put to sleep be called amusement. If I were her nurse I would prescribe a quieting draught and bed, as to a tired child; and so I take my leave and give my advice without any fee: it is always the cheapest thing in the world you know;" and he went away at the very proper moment, having left behind him the character of being the most agreeable man in the world.

"I should have come sooner," said Lord Albert, "to inquire for you, Lady Hamlet Vernon, but I was afraid of being too early; and I really put a restraint on my wishes in not being at your door much sooner; for I was very anxious to know you had not suffered from the shock you received last night."

"I have suffered, certainly," she replied, blushing, "but not to any alarming degree; a day or two of confinement to my sofa, and Dr.

Meynell assures me I shall be quite able to go about again as usual. In the mean time, here are my friends," pointing to the books, "who are ever at hand to entertain me."

"And surely," Lord D'Esterre replied, "there are a thousand living friends also, alike ready to endeavour to make the hours pass sweetly; nevertheless, I honour those who can be independent of society for entertainment."

Lady Hamlet Vernon saw she had guessed rightly, and went on to say, sighing as she spoke, "The fact is, that London crowds are *not* society, that the whole routine of a town life unsatisfactory; and that every circumstance, depending upon a mere pursuit of dissipation, is in itself necessarily an alienation, for the time at least in which we are engaged in it, from all our higher and better enjoyments; but then when one has lost all on whom one depended for comfort, and support, and advice; when one is left alone, a heart-broken thing upon the wide world, misjudged by some, condemned by many, flattered it may be by a few, there is such a stormy ocean, such a desert waste outspread to view, that the heart seeks

refuge from the alternative in a multitude of minor trifles, which leave no leisure to feel, still less to reflect; and hurrying on from hour to hour, one passes life away as chance directs."

Lady Hamlet Vernon did not know to whom she was speaking, or she would have spoken in a very different tone. She had heard of refinement and morality, she could even admire both; but to religious principle she was a stranger. She paused after having uttered the last words, and, looking in Lord Albert's countenance as she waited for a reply, read there a varying expression, the meaning of which she was at a loss to interpret. At last he spoke, and said with deep earnestness, which failed not to attract her attention, although she was not prepared to understand the import of his words:

"Is it possible! then I grieve for you indeed." As he uttered this brief sentence he took up a book, unconscious of what he was doing; and opening the title-page, read "Tremaine." Lady Hamlet Vernon had had recourse to her salts, to her handkerchief; and then, as if repressing her starting tears, she

asked, "What do you think of Tremaine?—is it not charming?—Do you know I have thought the hero was like you."

"I hope not; I would not be like that man on any account whatever."

"No!—and why?"

"Why, because I think false refinement the most wretched of human possessions; and all refinement is false which converts enjoyment to pain; nay, I deny that it is refinement; it is only the sophistry of a diseased mind, the excrescence of a beautiful plant; however, the work is a work of power, and its intention pure, though I do not think it free from danger. But tell me, Lady Hamlet Vernon—that is, will you give me leave to ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"Did you ever read the third volume of Tremaine attentively through?" She blushed a genuine blush as she replied: "*Not quite*: I am afraid—I thought it heavy."

"You do not surprise me; the mind must come tutored to the page to enjoy it as it ought to be enjoyed; and perhaps the fault which

might be found is precisely this, that those who would be most likely to read it, are those who would be least likely to benefit by its perusal."

"You certainly converse, Lord Albert," said Lady Hamlet Vernon, "very differently from any person I ever conversed with; your ideas are quite extraordinary to me, quite new, and you have made me lose myself in a world of thought; you make me feel that every thing I have hitherto thought was all mistake; but you must allow me to say, that, though willing to become your pupil, I must be somewhat instructed in this novel language before I feel myself competent to reply."

"What I said seems to me very simple; I am not conscious of having expressed any abstruse or recondite thoughts: at all events, I certainly did not mean to be affected, still less impertinent—it was something you said, which startled me, and made me feel concern, and it might seem to you, that I evinced it with too much freedom—if I have erred, pardon me."

"Pardon, my dear Lord! there is no question about pardoning; but I am curious to know what made you look so very grave when

I said I wished to forget my existence, and lose all sense of what had befallen me, or what might befall me, in the busy idleness of life—do you attach any very dreadful idea to this declaration?”

“A very dreadful one indeed,” was his reply.

“Well, then, I do begin to believe that what I heard of you was true—you are one of the saints—I mean, one of the set of people who go about preaching and praying all day long. But then you frequent balls and assemblies, and are so charming, I cannot reconcile this idea with your air, appearance, and demeanour, or with the character of those sour, misanthropic beings: do explain to me this mystery.”

“I wish I were one of those whom you so designate,” said Lord Albert D’Esterre gravely, —“but indeed I am far from being so. All I can say to explain my meaning briefly is, that I have received a Christian and religious education, and consequently that I think to live by chance, and to let accident sway our actions, is a perilous state of delusion.”

“ What do you mean to say, Lord Albert, that you regulate all your thoughts, words, and actions, by some strictly self-drawn line of rule?”

“ Oh, Lady Hamlet Vernon, you probe my conscience, and I am thankful to you: no, indeed, I have never yet been enabled so to do—but I wish I could—not indeed by any self-drawn line or rule, but that by which all ought to guide themselves.”

“ Well, at last I have met with one extraordinary person, and this our conversation must be resumed; but here comes some unwelcome visitor, and for the moment the subject must drop.”

The conversation was interrupted by the announcement of Mr. Temple Vernon. He has been already noticed as the object of Lady Tilney's particular dislike from his independent, and, as she termed it, rude freedom of character, and he must have been unpopular in a coterie where studied deportment and total absence of all nature formed a requisite merit for admission. But he was nearly allied by marriage to Lady Ham-

let Vernon, having inherited that portion of her late husband, Lord Hamlet Vernon's property, which was not bequeathed to herself. He was first cousin of the late Lord also, and Lady Hamlet Vernon's jointure being paid from estates that devolved to him, she had been condemned to keep up an intercourse which, under existing circumstances of his *mauvaise odeur*, in her particular circle, she would gladly have dispensed with. She however endeavoured to maintain that kind of friendly intercourse with him, which would prevent any thing like collision in matters where her own interest was concerned, and with this view preferred exposing herself to harsh remarks from Lady Tilney and others of the society, as to his admission into her house. "Ah, Mr. Vernon, is it you," said Lady Hamlet Vernon to him as he entered; "I hope I see you well?"

"Allow me rather to inquire, Lady Hamlet Vernon, about yourself; I have made a *détour* of at least two miles to satisfy my anxiety concerning you all. London is ringing with the terrible accident which befel you last night

Pray tell me all the particulars, and tell me too who was the fortunate knight-errant that rendered you assistance?" Lady Hamlet made an inclination of her head towards Lord Albert D'Esterre.

"Ah! is it so? well, he looks as if he were made for adventures," directing his glance towards Lord Albert. "Now, though I, poor devil that I am, desire no happier chance, I may drive about all day or night and no such good fortune ever betide me as delivering a lady from a perilous accident—really, Lord Albert, I congratulate you." Lord Albert bowed, as he replied,

"I am exceedingly happy that my servants were of any use; but indeed I had not the good fortune you ascribe to me: for I was sitting occupied in my library, and wholly unconscious of what passed in the street, till Lady Hamlet Vernon was brought into the house."

"Indeed, is it so? well, I have heard it said through the whole town, that Lady Hamlet Vernon's horses ran away, that the coachman was dashed from his box, and that some *preux*

chevalier had seized the horses in their course, and though nearly annihilated himself, had succeeded in his desperate efforts to stop them; whereas I am happy to see my Lord is safe and sound. Lady Hamlet, I rejoice to find very little the worse, and the long paragraph in the Morning Post all a lie. Well, there is only one thing to be done under these circumstances, which is to set the story right by a counter-statement, and therefore pray do tell me all the particulars."

Lady Hamlet Vernon smiled, with constrained complacency, saying, "you may tell the fact, Mr. Vernon, if you chuse to take the trouble, which is simply this;—that on returning home my coachman was drunk, and upset my carriage; and the accident happened close to Lord Albert D'Esterre's door, so that I was borne into his house, and received there every kind attention."

"But," enquired Mr. Temple Vernon, who had listened with evident eagerness to the recital, "where were you going?—whence were you coming?—for all these particulars are of importance."

“ Oh ! home.”

“ Good heavens, home ! and at the early hour of twelve ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ But where were you coming from ? ”

“ Oh ! we had been dining at Sir William Temple’s.”

“ Ah, and is that really so ? was all that Temple said at the clubs yesterday morning really true ? Did you, and the Tilney, and the Leinsengen, and I don’t know who else, dine with him ? Well, that is really too good—why no room in London will hold Temple after this. He was always insufferable, even before he was promoted in the world ; and now that affairs have taken this favourable turn, heaven knows what he will become ; why he’ll burst like the frog in the fable. But I am very sorry, for his dinners were good dinners in their way ; now, however, they will be intolerable, for they will consist in every course of *réchauffés* of what Lady Tilney admired, or did, or said—do tell me how the affair went off.”

“ Indeed, Mr. Temple Vernon, I cannot talk

more to-day; rather I pray you tell me some news—how did the D'Hermanton's party end?"

“ Well then, if you so command it, let us turn to my note book”—affecting to read, as he counted over his fingers, “ Lady Tilney was *not* at the Duchess of D'Hermanton's; Lady Ellersby *was*, but only walked through the apartments; Lady Boileau went no further than the first room; item, Mr. Pierpoint did not either; neither did Comtesse Leinsengen, who sat all the evening by Lord Baskerville, but spoke little; the Duke of Mercington only shewed his waistcoat, and then departed: all of which I hold to be signs that portend dark doings in the court of Denmark. Now this I think is a correct *résumé* of the Hermanton ‘at home.’ As to the politics of the last evening, it is confidently stated that the Duke of — has some famous bird-lime, called expediency, which will catch a vast number of young birds,” turning at the same time to Lord Albert, “ is it not so, my Lord?”

“ Mr. Temple Vernon seems so perfectly master of every body's intentions and affairs,

that I scarcely know, in his presence, whether or not I am master of my own."

"The fact is, my good Lord, that nobody knows what they are going to do (if they will only confess the truth) for two minutes together."

"In one sense that is true enough, Mr. Temple Vernon, for we intend many things which we never do, and *vice versâ*; nevertheless our will is free, and fortunately not always under the direction of others to guide it for us."

"Oh! this is becoming too deep for me," interrupted Lady Hamlet Vernon.

"And for me too," replied Mr. Temple Vernon, "as I have a thousand things to do before seven, and it is now past four o'clock; however I leave Lady Hamlet Vernon with less regret, knowing she has so entertaining a companion as Lord D'Esterre." This was said very ironically, and as the latter quickly perceived all the monkey malice of the man, he disarmed it of its sting by rising to depart, saying:

"Lady Hamlet Vernon has far more entertaining companions lying on her table, than are generally to be met with among London

idlers; and not to prove myself one of these, I must make my bow without further delay, trusting soon to have the pleasure of seeing her once more, in the gay scenes in which she is so fair an ornament;" and again bowing to Mr. Temple Vernon, he departed before the latter could leave the room.

"Well, my dear Lady, you owe me something, I am sure, for having rid you from the presence of that formal personage." Lady Hamlet Vernon did not look as if she agreed with him, but forced a smile as she replied :

"I like variety in character and manners; the world would grow dull, if every one were cut out on the same pattern."

"I am glad to hear you say that, my dear Lady Hamlet Vernon, for that is exactly what I think; and, therefore, I have always held off from the tyranny, which goes to make every body subscribe to the same code in manners, dress, hours, nay even language; and at least, my coat, my neckcloth, my hair, is all after a cut of my own, and I find all does vastly well; for if the world does not approve the one or like the other, they are at least afraid of me, be-

cause I think for myself. This answers my purpose precisely as well. But you look serious, I see, and therefore I will follow my Lord Albert D'Esterre's inimitable example, and leaving my last sentence in the tablets of your memory, farewell, most fair and fascinating lady. One word more I beg to add, remember that I wish exceedingly to go to Lady Tilney's next Friday, and I leave my wish in the hands of the kindest and fairest of the daughters of Eve. I *depend* upon your managing it for me."

"Oh! certainly, nothing is easier you know, you are always *le bien venu*, I wonder that you can make this request a favour."

"Ah! all that is very well from your lips, but you know, although I am the most admired man about town, I am sometimes by some chance forgotten. It is very odd that it should be so, but nevertheless it is often unjustly the case; and I correct fortune by such applications as the one I have just made to you; and now *je vous baise les mains* in the D'Esterre phraseology, though I would much rather do so in reality, and so farewell most fair."

“ Depend upon me,” replied Lady Hamlet Vernon, kissing her hand to him as he left the room. “ Depend upon my hating you most cordially,” she said to herself, as her head sank on the pillow of her sofa, and she tried to shut out from her recollection all his ill-timed *bavardage*, and to recal the strange but eloquent converse of the interesting Lord D’Esterre.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRIMA SERA; LETTERS, SNARES.

LADY Hamlet Vernon, in consequence of her recent accident, received society at home instead of seeking it abroad; and for several evenings the *élite* of *ton*, passed their *prima sera* at her house. Lord Albert D'Esterre was constant too in his attendance there, and was evidently much occupied with Lady Hamlet Vernon. His attentions did not escape remark, and though Lady Tilney's object, in wishing to possess an influence over Lord Albert, was quite of another nature, still she felt some disappointment at finding he was interested in another quarter, and therefore less likely to yield to the designs which she had formed upon his political independence.

"I'll tell you how that matter stands," replied Lord Rainham, as she inquired his opinion on the subject, "the *love* is at present entirely on the lady's side; Lord Albert is not

at all captive, and he has such obsolete ways of thinking, that I imagine he will not be easily caught. I should recommend his being given up altogether, he will never play a part among us, depend upon that; and you will not find him worth the trouble of educating."

"Oh! as to playing a part, my dear Lord, one does not want every body to play a part, at least not a *first* part you know; and as for *educating* them, that is quite out of the question."

"But," rejoined Lord Rainham, "you forget there is such a thing as persuasion; and it is said D'Esterre took his seat on the side of ministers by some means of that sort. Now it is possible, that although no *liaison de cœur* exists between him and Lady Hamlet Vernon, yet as a clever woman, she may have decided his vacillating judgment; to say the truth, I believe she has." Lady Tilney bit her lip, and something like the word provoking, escaped her, as she replied, "I would scorn to persuade any body to any thing against his will; there is nothing I have ever maintained more strenuously, than that every individual

should have a free choice in all the different elections of life." Lord Rainham smiled. "But after all," she added with an affected indifference, by which she attempted ineffectually to conceal her mortification, "it is of very little importance which side Lord Albert has taken."

"One would have thought so indeed but for the disappointment which is evident since he has declared himself," replied Lord Rainham, drily.

However, much Lady Tilney felt chagrined at the thought that another had succeeded in turning Lord Albert's mind in a direction contrary to her wishes, yet she was too politic to betray her disappointment to the person who had triumphed; and therefore, on the evening in question, she paid more than usual attention to Lady Hamlet Vernon.

"Dear Lady Hamlet Vernon," said Lady Tilney addressing her, as she took a seat by her, "you must not pretend to be ill any longer, we positively cannot do without you;" and then turning to Comtesse Leinsengen, she

added, "did you ever see any thing to equal the beauty of her fairy foot?"

This was a sore subject, as the reverse of the proposition always suggested itself to the Comtesse's fancy, in respect of her own; and she pretended on the present occasion not to hear it, but tossing up her head, took Lady Baskerville's arm, who was sitting on the other side of her, and whispered in her ear, "Lady Tilney does take such *engouements*, and then is as quickly tired of them, *des feus de pailles*," shrugging her shoulders contemptuously; "but I wonder she *like* to recall dat old story of her admiration for feet, when she made herself so very ridiculous in her affected praises of dat soi-disant princesse. De lady who professes to worship liberty, independence, and all dat sort of ting, to sit holding anoder woman's foot upon her knee, and making all dat sort of fuss, for my part, *je n'ai jamais pu concevoir ce plaisir là*.

"It does seem to me rather extraordinary," replied Lady Baskerville; "but then Lady Tilney is so very good-humoured, she always protects every body she thinks put

down or in distress." This was a prudent answer on Lady Baskerville's part, but not well received, which on perceiving, she quickly added :

"As to myself, I confess I do not take any pleasure in those sort of out-of-the-way admirations; I can admire beauty in other women; but I cannot affect to be so exceedingly enchanted by it as to turn *fille de chambre* in its honour. But there are many things in the world vastly ridiculous; for instance, can any thing be more so in its way than that Duke and Duchess D'Hermanton, who have been married I don't know how long, and are still *aux premiers amours*; one sees them eternally dawdling about together, as if persons came into company to be always setting a pattern of conjugal felicity. It is pardonable, perhaps, for very young people, during a few months to fancy themselves vastly in love; but after that time it is sickening—don't you think so Comtesse?"

"Oui, vraiment; au reste it is only in this country that people do give themselves such *ridicule*, and to say truth, not often, even here."

“ But pardon me, Comtesse,” said Lady Baskerville, withdrawing from her; “ I must go away, for I see Lord Boileau waiting for me, whom I had promised to take to Almack’s, and had nearly forgotten ;” so saying she passed into an adjoining room, and addressing him said :

“ Lord Boileau we are very late, and if we do not make haste we shall be shut out.”

“ Oh, no—all *that* is left out of the evening’s entertainment, I can assure you, for they begin to be afraid that nobody will go in, though the doors are left wide open all night.”

“ I am not surprised, for I hate the whole thing, and think it is become quite detestable, only I promised Lady Aveling to go to-night, so if you are ready let us begone;—but I have not made my curtsy to Lady Hamlet.”

“ Indeed, Lady Baskerville, you may spare yourself that trouble, if you mean to be agreeable, for do you not see she is enamoured *par-dessus les yeux* with *that* Lord Albert D’Esterre.”

“ Ah,” rejoined Lady Baskerville, looking in the direction where they sat, “ is it so? Well, every one has her taste; but I cannot say such a person would ever touch my heart.”

“Oh! *your* heart we all know is assailable but *by one*, and that Baskerville is the man, the most to be envied in all the world; to be sure there never was *such* a wife as you are, quite perfect, Lady Baskerville, only too perfect.” Lady Baskerville cast back her head, and looking at Lord Boileau with one of her *intelligent* smiles, they passed on, and stepping into the carriage, drove off to finish their evening amusements in the insipid glitter of an Almack’s ball.

After the lapse of some weeks Lady Hamlet Vernon was completely restored to health and beauty, and again resumed her usual routine of existence. She sought dissipation at all times eagerly, from habit; but now there was added to this impulse a restlessness of feeling, an anxiety if alone, and a void in her heart, from the evening in which her accident happened, such as she had never before experienced. It was in vain for her to conceal from herself, that she had perhaps *hitherto* unconsciously courted the society of Lord Albert D’Esterre more than of any other person, without considering how far she was yielding to the gra-

tification consistently with any probable chance of happiness to herself in the ultimate issue. She certainly had a decided preference for Lord Albert D'Esterre, or why did she seek every opportunity of seeing him; or why feel uneasy when she heard of his acknowledged affiance to another? These feelings prompted her to know more of the appearance and character of his intended bride, whom circumstances had as yet prevented from appearing in the great world of London, and to whom she was an utter stranger.

Under this influence, she determined to address a letter to one with whom she was in the habit of corresponding, and whom she knew to be on a visit to Dunmelraise, the seat of Lady Adeline's mother. She felt confident that she might take this step without compromising herself, and without her inquiries being deemed strange, or indicative of any thing beyond a natural curiosity. Shortly after this letter had been written, the following reply came from her friend, Mr. G. Foley; the contents of which were not at all calculated to tranquillize Lady Hamlet Vernon's feelings,

if she really had any affection for Lord Albert.

Letter from Mr. Foley to Lady Hamlet Vernon.

“ When one is not to write of that which one is thinking about, it is the most difficult thing in the world to write at all. But you command, and I must endeavour to obey. Let me see how am I to commence? Perhaps it is best that I do so by giving you *the history*, as one young lady writing to another would say, of the Lady Adeline Seymour. You know that Lady Dunmelraise, her mother, lost her husband and an only son soon after Lady Adeline’s birth; she then fell into low spirits and bad health, but by degrees roused herself to live for this child; and I must do her the justice to say, she has fulfilled her task admirably.

“ As to personal appearance, Lady Adeline Seymour is of that height which just escapes being too tall; of that slimness which just escapes being too thin; of that untutored manner which is often nearly being *gauche*, were

it not that it is accompanied by a childish grace which evades the charge. Quick of perception, and quicker still in feeling, she has a peculiar way of checking these impulses so as never to allow them to betray her into any unbecoming harshness or abruptness of manner; the very fear one entertains that she may overstep the boundary of polished *rétenu* gives an additional zest to her, but *gare a ceux qui voudroit l'imiter*—for she is perfectly original and defies all copyists. As to her face it is not marvellously beautiful, still less regularly so, but it is of such love-like paleness, chased by such sunny gleams of joyous youth continually playing over her features, that one could not wish it changed even for a more regular beauty. She is the very model of the poet's dream when he wrote—

——— ' Her pure and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
That one would almost say her body thought.'

“ Thus much for Lady Adeline's appearance and manners. In regard to the acquirements and endowments of her mental being, I am perhaps not myself qualified to speak—she is not precisely what the laborious educating

mammas would call accomplished, but she has a master genius for *one* art and a love for all. Her musical talent certainly requires much instruction to bring it to any perfection, but the scraps of airs she warbles as she flies about the house, are in the best taste as far as they go—and a few Venetian ballads which she sings to her guitar, and which she says her cousin taught her, are quite inebriating.

“ She unfeignedly undervalues all she does; perhaps too much so; but you read in her countenance that she is perfectly sincere; that all *spoken* praise distresses her; and you are involuntarily led to seek to give her homage in some more palatable shape.

“ What do you think of this portrait of the young Adeline? It looks like that of a heroine in romance, as I glance my eyes over the words, and yet I have such a nausea at all the persons bearing that designation, that I would fain save the delightful one of whom I am writing from that hacknied name. You must have heard, of course, that she is engaged to her cousin Lord Albert D’Esterre; but like

all those engagements made for people when they are children, I do not think it will be fulfilled *con amore*—not but what she blushes whenever she speaks of him, and *that* she does pretty frequently; and if he is grown up like a certain bust (for I have not seen him these three years, and boys change so from eighteen to one and twenty), he really must be *in bel Giovane*. By the way, she has made an exquisite drawing of *mon beau cousin*, but that is neither here nor there, the fiction of seventeen is always beautiful. Pray in your next gracious letter inform me what sort of man he has become, for I feel a brotherly regard for this very nice person, Lady Adeline Seymour, and should like to think she had a chance of happiness. Happiness, what a sound! but the reality, where is it?

‘ Come L’Araba Fenicè
 Che ci sia, ciascun lo dicè
 Dove sia, nessun lo sà.’

“ I should have told you, by the bye, that with all the gaiety, which is one of her greatest charms, Lady Adeline has a tincture of seriousness mingled with it, which some might

suppose approached to Methodism; but even if it is so, *à son age elle en guérira*.

“ I have been a long time here: but it has been a great gratification to me, and time has glided softly by; for in addition to the charms of the daughter, Lady Dunmelraise is in all respects a very agreeable and sensible woman, has seen a great deal of the world, and besides all that, honours your humble servant with her very particular regard; which she tells me is bestowed entirely for the sake of my mother, the friend whom she loved most in the world next to her own family; but I am vain enough to flatter myself that she likes me a little for mine own sake too. And you, who understand every thing *à demi mo'*, will know how soothing it is to a sick heart to receive kindness; this has induced me hitherto to linger on from day to day; but I shall vary the scene soon, for I begin to think that even I may be *de trop*; for I hear frequent mention made of Lord Albert D'Es-terre's expected arrival; so to-morrow I set off for Luryddicath Park. Lord Tresyllian's; who, you know, is father to Lord Albert.

“ And now, my dear Lady Hamlet Vernon, having given you the particulars you required, I will not weary you with more of myself: but in pity to me, seeing that I am still for a time cut off from that only tolerable place in England, London, do write me a brief, gracious missive, that I may feast upon it till I am once more restored to your presence, and in the mean while believe me to be the most devoted of your slaves. Can I say more?

“ G. FOLEY.”

Lady Hamlet Vernon, after perusing this letter, fell into a deep train of reflection, in which such can be called intense feeling usurping the mind, to the exclusion of every other idea. The image of Lady Adeline, thus vividly portrayed by Mr. Foley's pen, stood in actual presence before her; and combined with that image, rose the vision of Lord Albert D'Es-terre. The happiness which would be the growth of an union between two such persons as her knowledge of the one, and her fancied knowledge of the other, represented them, was embodied with forcible reality, and tears coursed each other involuntarily down her cheeks as

she sat, more like a marble image than a living being.

From this state she was suddenly roused by the servants announcing Lord Albert D'Es-terre himself; and making an effort to subdue the feeling which either she was too much ashamed, or too proud to own, she endeavoured to receive him with as much composure as she could assume. After the first words of course had passed, Lady Hamlet Vernon was too deeply absorbed in one subject for her readily to turn to any indifferent topic; and she at length addressed Lord Albert on the subject of her solicitude, saying, "Do you know I have received a letter this morning full of the praises of a person, in whom I believe you are much interested; it is from a friend of mine now staying at Dunmelraise, and who draws such a picture of the charms of Lady Adeline Seymour, that I wonder, Lord Albert, to see you here—but you are going to Dunmelraise, are you not, immediately?" Her tears almost flowed afresh as she pronounced these words; and unconsciously she cast a look of tender intreaty on Lord Albert. The latter had invo-

luntarily started, coloured, and hesitated to reply to this unexpected question; at length he answered:

“ No, not immediately; I am unable to leave town yet.”

“ You are not in love,” Lady Hamlet Vernon exclaimed, “ no, you are *not* in love with Lady Adeline Seymour—I read your heart in the measured calmness of your words; she is *not* the mistress of your affections.”

The sentence seemed to have escaped Lady Hamlet Vernon’s lips without the power of control, in a moment of excitement; and her eyes, which had been fixed on Lord Albert, now as suddenly fell beneath his gaze as he exclaimed with astonishment,

“ What can you mean, what *do* you mean, Lady Hamlet Vernon?” At that moment Lady Tilney was announced, and a minute after Lord Gascoigne. Conversation became general; but Lord Albert, evidently labouring under some painful feeling, took no part in it. Still he seemed determined to remain, to await the departure of the others, when Lady Tilney proposed to Lady Hamlet Vernon to

accompany her to the Park; and the latter, fearing that she had compromised herself in the too open expression of her feelings relative to Lord Albert and Lady Adeline Seymour, availed herself of the opportunity to avoid any renewal of the theme. With a heart ill at ease, she prepared to attend Lady Tilney to the dazzling throng of Hyde Park; while Lord Albert, seeing it was vain to look for any explanation of Lady Hamlet Vernon's extraordinary address to him at the moment, reluctantly handed her to Lady Tilney's carriage; and, trusting to some future opportunity to ask an explanation, he mounted his horse and rode off; but not with a mind so tranquil or a heart so buoyant as he had possessed a short time before.

In proposing to take Lady Hamlet Vernon to the Park, Lady Tilney's real object was to withdraw her from Lord Albert, whose anxiety had not escaped her observation, and whose political career she still had hopes might not be positively decided; at any rate, if hope remained, it was worth the trial; and should

she have been correct in her idea that Lord Albert had not committed himself irrevocably, no time was to be lost; that very moment perhaps he waited only the voice of Lady Hamlet's influence, to decide his wavering intentions. Lady Tilney's part was therefore quickly taken; and as they proceeded to the Park, she endeavoured to turn Lady Hamlet Vernon's mind from Lord Albert, if he really occupied any share in it, by adverting to every topic of the day; among other things she said:

“What do you think! Miss Melcomb's marriage with Lord Glenmore is at length declared. I had long had my suspicions that it would be so; but I cannot say I approve of the affair; and I am sure you will think with me, Lord Glenmore is too great a card to be played by that little miss, who has never left her mamma's wing; and has, of course, imbibed all her prejudices. But although Lord Glenmore has allied himself with this family, we must not wholly give him up; besides the Georgina is pretty, and she may yet not prove quite such a simpleton as she looks. Lady Tilney, however, in vain endeavoured to interest

Lady Hamlet Vernon in any subject she discussed; the former acquiesced in every thing her companion said, in order to avoid the argument which would have followed any dissent from her opinion. Lady Hamlet Vernon's remarks, when she made any, were short, and little to the purpose; and at length, wearied and ill at ease, she complained of a head-ache, and besought Lady Tilney to set her down at home.

When the carriage-door closed, Lady Tilney flung herself back, exclaiming as she drew up the glass, "How provokingly discreet, she did not once commit herself!" and Lady Tilney drove once more back to the Park, in the hope of seeing Lord Albert; and if possible, by courting his attention, of counteracting any influence which might have been exercised on his opinion by Lady Hamlet Vernon. She looked, however, in vain for him in the crowd; and at length drove home, disappointed and displeased at her want of success, and out of humour with every thing.

CHAPTER X.

FASHIONABLE FRIENDSHIP.

LORD Glenmore's marriage soon became the subject of general conversation. The day of the nuptials was already named, and the ceremony was to be in the most splendid style. In compliment to Lord Glenmore, several of his acquaintance were invited. Amongst these was Lady Tilney and Lady Tenderden; the Comtesse Leinsengen of course; and Lady Ellersby, who on her mother's side was related to the family of the Melcombs. The parties named expressed themselves annoyed at the idea of forming part of what they called the *Melcomb mélange*; but a secret wish to retain an influence with Lord Glenmore, whose marriage it was intended should not, without a trial of Miss Melcomb's aptitude for *ton*, banish him from their circle.

The whole affair, however, was *sotto sugazione* in the opinion of Lady Tilney and her friends.

“ The strangest thing of all is,” exclaimed the former, as she was conversing on the subject with Lady Tenderden and the Comtesse Leinsengen, “ that the marriage takes place in church.”

“ In church ! *quelle idée, vraiment on mourra de froid.*”

“ And pray how must one be dressed ?” inquired Lady Tenderden.

“ Oh, *en costume de traîneau*, I presume, since it is in von of your cold church ; but vat sinifies how von dresses for it ?”

“ If it rains I really must send my excuse,” said Lady Tilney, who wanted to be on a level at least with the Comtesse in impertinence.

“ Have you seen the *trousseau* ?” she added.

“ Yes, I have,” replied Lady Tenderden. Lady Tilney looked blank ; she could not bear that others should precede her even in the inspection of a *trousseau*. Lady Tenderden, continued :—“ Madame Duval brought me every thing that was worth seeing ; the laces are magnificent, and the *corbeille de nocés*, and every thing is in good taste. But here is Lady Ellersby,” exclaimed Lady Tenderden, glad

to break off from a subject which had been disagreeable to her, "I do not suppose *she* will approve of the programme of this ceremony."

"My dear Lady Ellersby," the ladies all exclaimed, running up to her, "why did you not exert your influence with Lady Melcomb to prevent this *baroque* fancy of being married in church; surely your relationship would have authorized your good advice on the occasion." Lady Ellersby looked surprised, and asked an explanation.

"Do you not know," answered Lady Tilney, "that the ceremony is to take place in a church?"

"La! does it? What a strange fancy!" drawled Lady Ellersby; "but I should never think of giving any advice to Lady Melcomb—I never do, to any body."

"Dat Mademoiselle Melcomb, vid all her imbecile *niaiserie*, seems not to have played her part amiss."

"I think she will turn out better than one could have supposed," rejoined Lady Tenderden, "when she becomes *un peu plus façonné*."

"Do tell me who are the invited?" inter-

rupted Lady Tilney, addressing Lady Ellersby.

“ Oh, half London, to be sure ; such a quantity of tiresome relations, and so much property, and family dignity, there will be no end of all the cousins—don’t you know they are just the sort of people who teem with relations ?”

“ But who is there of the party that one knows ?” replied Lady Tilney.

“ Oh, there are ourselves, and the Duke of Mercington, and the Boileaus, and Baskervilles, I believe ; I fancy too the Duke and Duchess D’Hermanton, and some of *that* set, are also among the *priés*, but I must go now *en qualité de cousine*, and leave my card with the Melcombs, and then I shall go on to Kitchener’s, who has the resetting of the family diamonds. I am told they are magnificent ; and I should so like to persuade Lord Ellersby to let mine be reset too, I have had them three years in their present form, and am so tired of them as they are—he, he, he!—well—adieu, we shall meet to-night at Lady De Chere’s ?”

“ *Avouez moi qu’elle passe la permission qu’ou*

a d'être bête," observed Lady Tenderden, as she left the room.

"May be so, but she is a very old friend of mine, and besides, she is perfectly *comme il faut*, and after all, that sort of thing gets on in the world just as well as talent."

"Perhaps better," rejoined Lady Tilney.

"*Précisément,*" said the Comtesse Leinsengen, "but, *il faut que je pars, je vais voir le trousseau*, for otherwise I shall have nothing to say to Lady Baskerville, who goes with me to-night to the Opera. *Adieu les belles, adieu.*"

"I wonder how she can be at the trouble of going to see that foolish *trousseau*," exclaimed Lady Tilney, as soon as she was out of hearing.

"She is so *inconséquente*. Did Lady Ellersby name the Baskervilles as being among the invited?" continued Lady Tilney.

"Oh yes, the Comtesse, depend upon it, has taken care they shall be asked; and my Lord is always flattered in being reckoned a requisite appendage to a woman of high rank; but he will soon find his error in depending on her smiles, for except for the gratification of the moment's vanity, she seeks no further aim, and at all

times scruples not to sacrifice her *çi-devant* friends to her new ones."

"Poor Lord Baskerville," replied Lady Tilney, "was intended to be by nature *le bon enfant*, which she calls him; but he has fallen into the terrible mistake of thinking himself a *leader of ton*, which gives him a ridicule that he would not otherwise have."

"How well you read characters, my dear Lady Tilney! But I thought he was a *protégé* of yours."

"Oh, so he is; I like him of all things; and he is often vastly useful. One must have different characters at command to fill different parts, or else nothing that one wants would go on. But to return to the Melcombs, I do not recover from my surprise about that marriage."

"It only shews what perseverance will do, I wished to talk the matter over with you, and to ascertain whether or not you meant to attend; so now I need not trouble you longer. Your gown you say is to be rose-colour, mine shall be jonquille."

"Ah, you always look divine in that golden light: but what light do you not look divine in?"

“ I must positively run away, or you will quite turn my head with flattery. Adieu, adieu,” and they parted well pleased with each other.

When Lady Ellersby stopped at Lady Melcomb’s door, where she had intended only to leave her card, a multiplicity of people on the same errand *faisoit queue à la porte* ; but to her infinite dismay, just as her carriage drove up, Lord Glenmore, who happened to be coming out of the door, approached her with a countenance beaming happiness.

“ I am sure Georgina will be at home to *you* ; do allow me to hand you out of your carriage.”

“ Not for the world, I would not intrude ; I am sure Miss Melcomb has a thousand things to do, and to arrange ; but—”

“ Nay, dear Lady Ellersby,” continued Lord Glenmore, pressingly (who thought every one must be as anxious to see his bride, as he was eager she should be seen), “ Georgina will be so disappointed if you do not go up stairs, that I must entreat you will.” And in short, for once, what between curiosity to look at the

bridal paraphernalia, and a sort of awkwardness to do a decided thing, and say no, Lady Ellersby's indolence was overcome, and she allowed herself to be handed up stairs into the drawing room, where were assembled a host of ladies (*not* Miss Melcomb), who were busily engaged admiring the various dresses and finery which were displayed before them.

“ You are just come in time, Lady Ellersby,” exclaimed Lady Aveling, “ for after to-day, nobody is to be admitted.”

“ No ? well, la ! I am glad then ; but my dear Lady Melcomb I came, I assure you, expressly to wish you joy, and to leave my congratulations also with Miss Melcomb, whom I hope, I am to see, for Lord Glenmore insisted on my coming in, otherwise I would not have done so—knowing how tiresome visitors are at such a moment ; but since I am here, do me the favour to mention to Miss Melcomb, how very happy I am to have the opportunity of wishing her joy.”

“ And do look,” cried Lady Aveling, “ at this enchanting hat ; it is just come from Paris—was there ever any thing *de meilleur goût* ?

—and then look at this, and that *seduisante*—really, Lady Melcomb, your selection has been exquisite. But here comes the bride.”

Then ensued kisses, curtseys, and congratulations, during which Lord Glenmore retired, wearied with the nonsense of the female coterie, and despairing of even catching a glance from Miss Melcomb.

While the marriage ornaments continued to absorb the attention of the other visitors, Miss Melcomb took Lady Ellersby aside to shew her what, she said, was infinitely better worth looking at—a miniature of Lord Glenmore.

“ So, my dear,” said Lady Ellersby, “ you are really what they call in love? he, he, he!”

“ I am fondly attached to Lord Glenmore, and feel proud now in declaring it;—it has become my happy duty,” replied Miss Melcomb.

“ Duty!” replied Lady Ellersby, opening her mouth, and *ouvrant des grands yeux*, “ he, he, he!—surely you are not serious? Whoever heard a young person going to be married, that is, going to be her own mistress, talk of duty! Tell me, really are you not delighted at the idea of having horses and equipages, and

doing exactly what you like, and going out every where you please? That was what I liked and thought of, when I was going to be married, and——but then I was not in love—he, he, he!”

“No?” replied Miss Melcomb, somewhat astonished.

“Certainly not—he, he, he!”

“I have no wish,” rejoined Miss Melcomb, “to be more my own mistress than I am at present. I shall, on the contrary, feel myself less at liberty, for of course a married woman has a thousand things to think of which a girl has not.”

“La, my dear, you talk in a way which it is very right to teach children, but when people act for themselves they think very differently. Every body, you know, marries to avoid being governed.”

“I never could have married for that reason, for I have been the happiest of creatures at home.”

“Well really, la! you don't say so! But now you will have an opera box, jewels, equipages, and all sorts of delightful things.”

“ I don't know—perhaps if Lord Glenmore intends I should—”

“ La, how droll you are; you don't really mean to set out by asking his leave, or consulting him on such trifling subjects as these, my dear child, he, he, he! you are enough to spoil any husband.—Well, good morning—you must correct yourself of such *enfantillage*—remember what I say. Six months will not have elapsed before you recant all this, and change your present mode of thinking and feeling.”

Miss Melcomb smiled, and shook her head in token of dissent. “ Good morning,” Lady Ellersby repeated, “ I have already intruded too much upon your time; I shall be delighted to cultivate your society when you come back a gay bride; and pray tell Lady Melcomb I will not torment her any more just now.—Once again accept my congratulations, and my best compliments to Lord Melcomb, he, he, he!”

It is a strange thing that in the happiest of times there is often a word spoken, or a thing occurs, which seems to interpose a dark spot

upon the brightness of happiness, as though we were not to forget the nature of mortal felicity. Lady Ellersby's words, of six months will not elapse ere you have changed your present feelings—sounded in Miss Melcomb's ears long after they had been spoken; and though she strove to drive them from her remembrance, they remained fixed there like a warning which she was not to disregard—a foreboding of evil (for to the happy all change has terror in it). Minor circumstances such as this, have happened to every body in their course through life, and have been like visions which opened a vista to futurity.

The day at length came which was to unite Miss Melcomb with Lord Glenmore, and the various persons invited met at Lord Melcomb's house, from whence their carriages followed in the suite of that of the bride's. The ceremony took place in St. James's Chapel, and it was a beautiful sight to see the bride, with composed bashfulness, in the long white robe and coronal that bound her veiled brows, so fitly emblematic of her own purity, supported by her father to the altar, and given from the paternal

arms into those of a husband, who was henceforth to be all the world to her, and whom she acknowledged to be lord of her affections in the seriousness of true and deep attachment, as the chosen of her heart. Her velvet prayer book in one hand—the other folding her veil across her person, which it but partially concealed, she knelt down in that spirit of piety which hallows and sanctifies the vows she was about to take. The previous tremor which had shook her frame as she advanced to the altar, was stilled into composure as she bent the knee, and raised her thoughts to heaven.

Lord Glenmore, too, seemed imbued with the same devout feelings, and all those who came with lighter thoughts, appeared, outwardly at least, impressed.

When the ceremony closed, the now Lady Glenmore knelt before her parents, and as they pressed her to their breast, blessed her with silent fervour; and even the most insensible acknowledged a touch of feeling at this scene. Lady De Chere was heard to say, that she had no idea it would be made such a serious affair of; had she known it, she certainly would not have

been present. Congratulations having been offered on every side, some with sincere goodwill, but the greater part with common-place phrase; the marriage party returned to Lady Melcomb's, where a breakfast had been prepared.

“What a *mélange* of persons!” observed Lady Ellersby, as she stopped in the doorway on entering, in order to reconnoitre. “If I had not been obliged” (she whispered to Lady Tilney), “nothing should have brought me here.”

“And *I* most indubitably should not have come,” replied the latter, “had it not been to *oblige you*; and after all I would have given a great deal that I *had not*: for I assure you, my dear, as soon as the affair of the day is over, *we* must none of us be seen here again; what we may do respecting Lord and Lady Glenmere, *reste a savoir*. But yonder is Lady Baskerville and Lady Tenderden, let us join them, and by keeping as much as possible together, and talking to no one but in our own circle, shew that we are not here even at present on

familiar footing." Lady Baskerville was conversing with Lady Tenderden on one of those square Ottomans *dos-a-dos*, with their several cavaliers by them, Lord Tonnerre, Lord Gascoigne, Lord Boileau, &c.

"Well I am sure," said Lady Baskerville, addressing Lord Boileau, "if I were Lady Glenmore, I should heartily wish all this *étiquette de nocés* was over; when a marriage has taken place, and it is known to all the world, the amusement is ended, and there is nothing to be wished for, but the comfortable arrangement of two sensible persons, who know what it is to live without being *a charge* to each other."

"To be sure," replied Lord Boileau, "I wonder how people can make this sort of fuss and *étalage*; it is assuming that one is interested for them—nobody cares whether any body is happy or miserable, and it is a bad taste to *affiché* their private feelings in this public manner."

At this moment a general movement in one of the apartments attracted every body's attention.—"Lord Melcomb is dead!" "Lord

Melcomb is dying!" resounded in audible whispers.

"Call my carriage."—"How shocking."—"I would not be in the room with a corpse for the world."—"Do let us get away."

"Who knows but it may be catching—how fortunate for Glenmore," said Lord Boileau, looking over the people's heads, as he beheld Lord Melcomb apparently lifeless. "He will have the pretty heiress and her fortune at the same moment."

"What do you mean?" asked some one who stood near.

"Why, only if the old Lord dies, that Miss Melcomb becomes immediate mistress of Melcomb Park, and an estate of ten thousand a year."

"Does she! you do not mean so; had I known that, I would have proposed to the girl myself," said Lord Tonnerre.

"But is he really in an apoplectic fit?" said another.

"Perhaps, but sometimes people do outlive these sort of things, and walk about quite gaily many years."

“Ah! there is that chance to be sure,” said Lady Baskerville, laughing. It is lamentable to remark, how those who live in fashion’s fooleries become actually indifferent to every thing, and to every circumstance, of what mighty moment soever, that does not immediately concern their interests and pleasures. The most tremendous events, the most awful dispensations, the most surprising occurrences are to them so many little coloured bubbles, that seem to blow about for their amusement, or targets set up to shoot jokes at. Life and death seem but as foot-balls for these puppets to play with: it would be laughable if it were not horrible.

Lord Melcomb had only a fainting fit, occasioned by over fatigue, and the heat of the room. The brilliant crowd, however, which were assembled at his house, fled in dismay on the first alarm of sickness or of sorrow; and their inquiries the next day for his health, were influenced more by curiosity, than by any feeling of humanity, or any real care whether he were alive or dead. This event, however, had a very different effect on the minds of Lord

Melcomb's sincere friends, who waited with anxiety to learn the effects of this sudden illness. On Lady Glenmore's mind it cast a cloud, which seemed to overshadow the bright dawning of her happiness; and she trembled at the idea of some unknown calamity, an idea which had once before visited her, when called up by Lady Eilersby's words, and which now again recurred to her with painful intensesness. A short hour, however, relieved every one from anxiety; Lord Melcomb was completely restored, and he received the embraces of his child: when kissing away the tears, which she could not restrain, he entreated her to lay aside all fears on his account. Once more the bridal pair received the parental blessing; and taking leave of the few dear friends that surrounded them, stepped into their carriage and set off for Lord Glenmore's villa, where after remaining a short time, and feeling quite reassured on Lord Melcomb's account, they proceeded on a tour to Paris.

CHAPTER XI.

A FASHIONABLE EASTER.

THE season was approaching when, in good old times, the heads of great families left the metropolis, and in the retirement of their country seats or villas devoted the precious hours of the solemn festival of Easter to reflection, apart from busy scenes of public life in the bosoms of their families—thus setting an example worthy of imitation : and overcoming, in some degree, the difficulty with which we know a rich man shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

How widely different is it at the present day with those who call themselves *The Ton*. They go indeed, at this holy season, to villas, and country seats, but take with them there all the follies, and vices, and habits of that daily idleness and dissipation which can suffer no pause in its riot, no diminution in its intoxication.

Lady Ellersby had invited to Restormel Lady Tilney and the more select of her coterie. Some there were, the subalterns of their *corps élite*, who, however subservient and ready they had proved themselves to adopt the follies of exclusiveness, had as yet failed in establishing themselves in its full rights and prerogatives, and who, after the sacrifice of their own true dignity, still found themselves but as tools in the hands of others. These, often overlooked in the more *recherché* amusements, *heard* of the party at Restormel, but only *heard*, and were not among the invited. To be excluded on such an occasion was a mortification of the severest kind, and it became a matter of the greatest importance to have their names inserted, if possible, on the select list. To obtain this point, the infinite pains and ingenuity employed were worthy of a better cause. The Baskervilles were of the number overlooked; and, addressing his wife on the subject with as much eagerness as it was permitted one of his dignified refinement to display, Lord Baskerville said:

“ Imagine what Boileau has just told me ;

Lady Ellersby has a party at Restormel next week! I do think *we* had a right to be asked; don't you?"

"Oh certainly, *love*," replied Lady Baskerville, a sweet-sounding epithet of affection which but on few occasions passed between them: "Certainly: and if we are not, I shall think it quite rude; but *I will* arrange the matter."

That night Lady Baskerville went to the Opera with Lady Boileau; as soon as an opportunity presented itself, Lady Baskerville turned suddenly round, and said, "Oh, there is Lady Ellersby, I see, in her box: how well she looks—of *course you* are going to Restormel at Easter?" and she kissed her hand the while, in her most smiling manner, to the lady of whom she spoke.

"No, I am not invited," replied Lady Boileau. "Are you?"

"Yes," rejoined Lady Baskerville, (determined to hazard the lie at all events, and trust to chance, or her own devices, to make it true afterwards.) "But how very odd she should have left you out; it must be some mistake."

“ Oh, no, it is not a mistake—it cannot be; for Lady Ellersby, you know, makes all her invitations on these occasions *de vive voix*. Lady Baskerville almost betrayed herself as she *felt* Lady Boileau’s penetrating eyes fixed upon her’s, with a scrutiny she did not wish to prolong; however she rallied dexterously, and turned off the discourse into some other channel; but Lady Boileau returned to the charge, saying:

“ Well, my dear Lady Baskerville, as *you are* asked, do you not think you could get us invited also? You know I hardly ever break my rule of running the risk of compromising a friend by tormenting her to procure invitations, but for this once I think I may venture, considering our long friendship, to entrust you with the secret (for you know I would not have it said for the world), that I wish to be of the number of the *Priées* to Restormel—now as I intend giving my first ball immediately after Easter, I shall consult her to-night about certain persons whom I am rather doubtful whether I shall ask or not, and then by

appealing to you, throw the conversation into your hands, and give you an opportunity of naming those who are invited to Restormel, which will bring about the subject in such a natural way, that either I must be asked or she will commit herself by a rudeness which she generally avoids."

Lady Baskerville sat on thorns, but during the length of this speech she had leisure to collect her scattered senses, and began a reply equally elaborate, professing herself to be exceedingly attached and obliged to Lady Boileau, and for *that very reason* declining all interference on the present occasion—"for you know," she said, "it makes one so very *nervous* to put a friend under the unpleasant predicament of being refused. Besides, the moment one lets the world know that one has a friend who wants any thing, people begin immediately to conclude that they may want many things, and directly look shy, and make an excuse, and get off, and probably cut both the *asker* and the person for whom they ask. However *you know* I will do what *I can do*, but only I entreat you will leave

me at liberty to chuse the mode of managing this business."

"Yes," rejoined Lady Boileau, "most certainly ; but perhaps the best way of all will be to say nothing about it, beforehand, and then for me to arrive unexpectedly, and say *you* had asked me, and had forgotten to mention to Lady Ellersby that you had done so."

"Oh! *not for the world*, my dearest Lady Boileau, not for the world,—besides,—I just recollect—Lord Baskerville had some idea we should not go at all ;"—at that instant arrives Lord Baskerville himself, and forgetting his acquired manner, he opened the box-door somewhat abruptly, and in his natural gay agreeable way, such as is his own when he ceases to remember he is an exclusive, he said, addressing Lady Baskerville,

"I have this instant had an invitation for you, which I am sure you will accept with pleasure : it is from Lady Ellersby to go to Restormel."

"Dear ! la ! Lord Baskerville, how odd you are—that is so like you—to have forgot—and Lady Ellersby too, she must have for-

gotten, don't you know *we were* asked a fortnight ago."

"Ah—hem! very true," and taking the hint which Lady Baskerville had given him by an expressive glance, "hem! I *had* really forgotten, I always forget *those sort of things*, hem!"

"Yes, and you said then, *if you* remember, that *you* would not go, for that you thought of visiting Tunbridge, as you always conceived Restormel to be a dull, damp place, and so unwholesome, with its quantity of trees and stagnant water."

"Ay—so I did,—hem! very true, and so it is, and now you put me in mind, I rather suppose *we*, that is *I*, shall not go, for of course *your* ladyship will do as you chuse."

Lady Boileau, though young in years, was too old a bird of fashion to be caught with chaff; she saw through this matrimonial manœuvre, but was too prudent to let her perception be seen; and in regard to Lady Baskerville's refusal on the subject of Restormel, she pretended to take it as the latter intended it should be taken, and her outward appear-

ance remained unruffled, but at the same time it was marked in the tablets of her memory, as a token of friendship *not to be forgotten*.

“ Indeed,” replied Lady Boileau, in answer to Lord Baskerville’s last remark, “ you are both quite right, Restormel *is* a *dull* place, and I advise you to secure a party for Tunbridge, in which I shall be most happy to join you.”

“ I will think about it, hem !” replied Lord Baskerville, “ and consult the Comtesse Leinsengen,” and thus he bowed out of the box. Shortly after, Lady Baskerville feigned a very bad head-ache and retired before the end of the ballet. Not so Lady Boileau; she watched Lady Ellersby’s movements, and contrived to meet her in the room just at the very moment when the crowd prevented her escaping.

“ What do you think I have been doing all night?” Lady Boileau asked?

“ Not listening to the Opera,” replied Mr. Spencer Newcomb, who was handing Lady Ellersby.

“ As if any body ever really came to attend to or listen to it !” she observed; “ it is the very last thing one comes to the Opera for,” yawning.

“I have been much better employed,” rejoined Lady Boileau, “for I have been defending the *agrémens* of Restormel against Lord and Lady Baskerville’s assertion of its being the dullest place in the world; they both declared it always gave them the vapours.”

“So it does me,” replied Lady Ellersby, again yawning, “and that is precisely the reason why I take such special care never to go there, without having it well filled. But then all places in the country are alike, and one *must* go out of town at Easter.”

“Well, Lady Ellersby, that may be true enough: all country places are insufferably dull except it be to give a fête during the lilac and laburnum season; but I think your friends might make some distinction between *you* and your *place*, and as far as I could observe there was none made by the Baskervilles.”

“Oh was there *not*, he, he! Oh if such is the case I am sorry I asked them to-night.”

“To-night! did you not make Lady Baskerville the invitation long before to-night? you will pardon my asking the question; I

have a particular reason, which I will explain to you hereafter, for doing so."

"La, dear, no," yawning "I never thought of asking any body *long ago*." This, though in contradiction to her former declaration of taking care to *secure* a party, she was obliged to say in order to avoid a marked rudeness to Lady Boileau, "and," she continued, "now I have the good fortune to meet you, dear Lady Boileau, will you and Lord Boileau have the charity to join us; and, notwithstanding Lady Baskerville's terrific account of Restormel, venture to come and *egayer* its melancholy bowers; at all events it will be better than remaining in town, and we will try to do what we can to render ourselves agreeable to you."

"I shall be delighted; we shall have the greatest pleasure in waiting upon you, and am certain we shall be extremely well amused."

The great object of Lady Boileau's day was now successfully attained, and doubtless she laid her head upon her pillow that night with all the satisfaction which such success ought to confer. Lady Baskerville, on her part rejoiced

in having as she thought so completely outmanœuvred her friend, and enjoyed the triumph which her superior skill in the management of such matters, as well as her superior knowledge of *the world*, had afforded her. Yet these women called each other *friends*! How is that sacred name profaned, that name which can have no embodied existence, but with the sincere and good, yet which is polluted in the world's mouth at every instant.

Restormel was, as it had been described by Lady Baskerville, an exceedingly gloomy place, but all within the house was luxury; beyond its walls, however, there were none of those moral circumstances which can give interest even to the dullest spot. The scenery was monotonous and insipid; but there might have been an enlivening character thrown over the gloom, in the happy countenances and cheerful looks of dependents and retainers, if such had been the will of the possessors of Restormel. But this was not the case, the cold calculating system of employment of the poor, merely when the purpose of keeping up the grounds or other

improvements made it necessary, and then taking no further charge whatever of the beings so employed, regarding them only as the labourers of the hour, conspired to give the place a moral, as well as a natural gloom.

No peasant's abode in these domains was ever cheered by Lady Ellersby's presence; no sufferer in sickness or distress alleviated beyond the donation of money, and that but seldom;—none of those heart-interests in short were ever evinced, on her, or her Lord's part, which confer a mutual delight on those who receive, and on those who bestow them, and which maintain that link between the higher and lower classes, which is at once so beautiful and so beneficial, and without which all the luxuries in the world will never produce any thing but a melancholy and unsatisfying grandeur.

There certainly, however, were the means, if they had been resorted to, for every laudable gratification of interest and entertainment at Restormel. And where is the country place in which, if its possessor fulfil the various duties the possession entails on him,

the means are wanting; and even as it was, if that sickly appetite for excitement which characterised its present inhabitants could ever have been satisfied, it must have been here, where every thing connected with their system of life was found in profusion; but the factitious smiles which gild the exterior of such a circle as was generally to be met with at Restormel is not the sunshine of real happiness.

Easter was now arrived and the party assembled at Restormel, consisted of the Tilneys, the Tenderdens, the Baskervilles, the Leinsengens, Luttermanns, Lord Ton-
nere, Lady Hamlet Vernon, Lord Albert d'Esterre (who was asked *on trial*), Lord and Lady Boileau, by the manœuvre which has been described, and one or two single men like Mr. Leslie Winyard, Mr. Spencer Newcomb, &c. &c.

These persons all met on the first night of their arrival at an eight o'clock dinner. Lord Albert d'Esterre had been invited at Lady Tilney's suggestion, who considered a country house a good stage for the display of a new

debutant, and as affording no unpropitious opportunity of forwarding her wishes in regard to Lord Albert's political bias. These wishes, however, were soon doomed to disappointment; Lord Albert had accepted the invitation under the impression that in the country there was more leisure and tranquillity than the hurry of a London life allowed; but whether in the country or town, he might have known, had not the fatal mist of delusion which comes over all who enter on a tortuous path begun to blind him, that reflection and serenity of mind do not depend on time or place; that power, that calm, may be destroyed or may be nurtured in cities, as in lonely wilds, it is true; but had he thought for a moment, he would have felt that the gay assemblage in which he was to mix at Restormel, was not calculated to restore him to that state of mind which he believed himself anxious to regain.

In the course of Lord Albert D'Esterre's acquaintance with Lady Hamlet Vernon, he had discovered much to charm, to dazzle, and to lead a mind so young as his into a maze of error. Sophistry had gradually drawn its

veil before his perception of truth; through this he viewed her character; and under the same delusive influence, he persuaded himself that the interest he took in her arose from the purest motive, namely that of endeavouring to free from error, one whose nature was naturally endowed with capabilities for becoming truly estimable. He listened to all her dangerous and seductive opinions, while he gazed on her beauty, bewildered with the false conviction that he did so to prove to her the error of the one, and to point out the peril which, with such unfixed tenets, the other would most probably lead her into.

What a melancholy prospect, he inwardly exclaimed, lies before that beautiful creature, whose principles have never been formed to virtue, and who has been cast among those whose every axiom is contrary to the laws of purity and truth! What delight in the reflection, what a good action it will be, to disentangle such a being from the snares that surround her, and restore her to a life of usefulness and happiness. My heart aches for her, when I think how in early youth, before

she could know her own wishes, she was married to an unprincipled husband, one who could never have known her worth; she must not be abandoned without an effort to save her. Thus did Lord Albert parley with himself, till a dangerous admixture of evil glided in with his better feelings, and prevented that clear perception between right and wrong, which under his engagements should have made him at once fly from Lady Hamlet Vernon. It was *not* so, however, and Lady Hamlet Vernon was more the object that led him to Restormel, than any wish for, or sense of, the necessity of retirement and reflection.

The mode of living at Restormel was what Spencer Newcomb wittily called the *foreign system*, that is, every pleasure-giving circumstance was throughout the daily routine cultivated to the utmost point which art could reach. To give an account of it in detail would be a work of supererogation; for it was a transfer of London to the country, only with this difference, that the post town and high road took place of the streets of the metropolis; and the shrubberies and gardens of Restormel, of those

of Kensington and the Park ; with the exception, too, of a rather animated discussion between Lady Tilney and Lord Tonnerre on the subject of female influence; and which brought the parties into closer collision, than was consistent with the outward harmony of exclusive *ton*.

Little occurred during the first few days of the retreat to Restormel to vary the monotony of the scene. With reference to this latter subject, Lady Tilney remarked to Lady Baskerville, as they left the dining-room, on the evening when the affair alluded to had taken place, " I am very sorry, my dear Lady Baskerville, very sorry indeed, that what I said should have taken such a desperate effect on your friend Lord Tonnerre; however, it does every body good to hear the truth now and then, and as he seldom if ever hears it, I think I have done him service in sounding that tocsin in his ears for once in his life, don't you, my dear?"

" He, he, he!" tittered Lady Baskerville, who did not like to offend the speaker, though she was really angry with her in her heart;

“I dare say you are quite right—but for my part, I never wish to teach anybody any thing; I was so tired of being taught myself, that whatever reminds me of the dull days of being a good girl, and having a governess, quite overcomes me.”

“Oh,” observed the Comtesse Leinsengen, “what sinnify, whether dat Lord is in a passion or not, nothing will ever change him. He knows but two phrases in the dictionary, *I will* and *I won't*, you *shall* and you *shan't*, and he do tink himself, and all dat belong to himself, quite perfect, *c'est une ignorance crasse a tout prendre*, but what *sinnify* it? He was alway Milor Tonnerre, he *is* Milor Tonnerre, he will alway *be* Milor Tonnerre; *laisser le grogner, c'est son métier; en qualité de Tonnerre il grognera toujours, quesque ça nous fait? il n'est pas notre mari laisse-le là de grâces,*” and she looked at Lady Baskerville as she spoke.

This affair, however, did not pass over quite so easily as Lady Tilney would have had it; and it ended in Lord Tonnerre's goings suddenly

to town ; and Lady Baskerville remaining in exceedingly bad humour : for to be without an *attaché quelconque* was as bad as to be without a hat from Herbot's.

CHAPTER XII.

FASCINATION—THE CHURCH-YARD, &c.

IN a continued scene of frivolity, to call it by no harsher name, and in the turmoil of petty passions and jarring female interests, passed the hours at Restormel that led on to the most solemn period of the year. Amongst the actors in it, Lord Albert D'Esterre cannot (with the feelings and character which he still possessed) be supposed to have held a part at all consistent with his true wishes; and, but for the increasing and alarming fascination of his senses, and the warping of his better judgment, by the influence which Lady Hamlet Vernon still, day by day, more effectually exercised over him, he would have quitted a society altogether, of which he could never really form a component part, and *from* which, but for the third power which held him in combination with it, he must have quickly separated himself.

But, however much this fatal influence might affect the general line of his conduct, the good seeds sown in early life, though sadly choaked as they had been, were not yet totally eradicated; and on the morning of the Easter festival, he took his way to the village to obey the calling bell of church. The service had begun when he entered, and it was not till the first lesson was commenced that he lifted his eyes from the book, and beheld in the family pew opposite Lady Hamlet Vernon. A flush of various feelings coloured his cheek, and suffused with a richer glow even the whiteness of his forehead. She is then, he thought, in despite of the example around her, really good;—she has listened to my advice; she has come to the fountain-head for instruction—all is well! He then endeavoured to follow the service throughout its solemn beauty; but his mind was disturbed, and his thoughts wandered.

When the congregation was dismissed, of course he bowed and approached Lady Hamlet Vernon with the greetings of the morning salutations, and offering her his arm, they

walked slowly on into the church-yard; it was one of those quiet gray days, which belong neither to winter nor spring, but owned affinity with both, and there was a freshness in the odour of the new trodden grass, which might have been deemed the precursor of flowers, had not a frosty air chilled the sweet promise;—some fine old yews surrounded the church-yard, and the gay colours of the country peoples' ribbons and cloaks appeared in brilliant relief as they lingered beneath the dark boughs.

The rustic curtsey, and abrupt inclination of respect, which were offered in homage to Lord D'Esterre and Lady Hamlet Vernon on either side, as they passed through the village throng, indicated that the actions of those in the higher ranks of life can never be disregarded by the lower; a kind of deep respect, and an apparent satisfaction, sat on the countenances of these good people, and they showed by their very looks and manner, that they felt the hallowing of the sabbath to be a link of sympathy existing between them and

their superiors, which mutually allied them in the bonds of christian fellowship.

These are feelings which, even in the uneducated, are still indigenous to the human heart, and, if cherished and preserved, become as productive of good as, when neglected or contemned, they tend to incalculable evil. As Lord Albert and Lady Hamlet Vernon passed along, the latter observed :

“ I love to linger here ; these rude memorials of love and respect to the dead” (pointing to the graves at their feet) “ are a mournful gratification to the living ; they tell us that in our turn we may at least hope to remain some short time in the memories of those whom we quit ; but after all, *tout passe,*” and she sighed heavily ;—“ yes, *here* undoubtedly all that the proudest trophies can do, is for a time to point the moral of a good or bad character by the stone that covers or decorates the tomb.”

“ But the tomb, dear Lady Hamlet, is only the repository of the dust ; it will itself become like the dust it covers ; but never, like that awakened dust, be infused with new life, a life far more glorious than all that we can form

an idea of; and we must look not *upon*, not *in* the grave, but beyond it, where death is swallowed up in victory."

"*You* can do this, and you are happy," she replied. A cold revulsion struck on Lord Albert's heart as she paused and breathed with labouring breath,—“and can *you* not do so?” he asked in deep low tone and shuddered as he spoke. She shook her head; and after a moment's pause said, “all the happiness I know is confined to a few brief moments—a few electric gleams of pleasure, which vanish in their birth; a feverish uncertain and fearful catching at delight, which yet eludes my grasp. These are all the means which I possess to obtain happiness; yet, such as they are, and such as my success in them is, I would not exchange them for yours—what! exchange your cold, leaden, measured *theories of feelings*, for they are nothing more—or the beating pulse of spontaneous joy, which even in this moment of our communing is mine; no, Lord Albert, no—meanly as I think of myself when measured by your standard in the general tenour of our existence, and in the

scale of being, there are moments when I soar above all that was ever dreamt of in your philosophy,'—and as she spoke her eyes danced in a deceptive brilliancy that for the moment turned Lord Albert's brain. He shuddered as he felt the pressure of her arm on his while she uttered these words, and his uncertain footsteps slid upon the base of a marble tomb.

In the action of recovering himself, a kind of change seemed to pass through his frame; so much are we influenced by trivial circumstances, which yet are surely not the agents of chance; in so doing his eyes rested on an inscription engraven on the stone, and as if glad to escape from answering her, he read the following lines:

They were so one, it never could be said
Which of them ruled, or which of them obeyed;
He ruled because she would obey, and she
By him obeying, ruled as well as he.
There ne'er was known betwixt them a dispute,
Save which the other's will should execute.

“The lines are indeed beautiful,” said Lady Hamlet Vernon, “and I could be content to be the mould under that stone, if I had ever enjoyed an existence to which they might with

truth have been applied—but as it is, *non ragionam di lor* ;” and she sprang lightly forwards, adding in a tone of affected levity, “let us make haste back to Restormel ; why, dear Lord Albert, we shall be laughed at if it is known that we have been to church.” The spell was broken, he made no reply, and they continued the remainder of their walk in silence.

“Hard, cold, insensate man !” cried Lady Hamlet Vernon, when she reached her own apartment ; “but he shall be met with an equal share of self-love. I will subdue this haughty nature, and mock at him, when his hour of suffering arrives. If he loved passionately any thing, even that doll, that infant, that piece of clock-work Lady Adeline Seymour, I could forgive him ; but he does not, it is a systematical pursuit of an ideal perfection, that leaves his heart always cold and untouched, and fenced round as it were with adamant. Proud D’Esterre, thou shalt weep for this”—and she paused for a moment, then collecting all her thoughts, her final resolution was taken, and availing herself of a communication which

she had to make to Mr. Foley, who she trusted might be instrumental to her purpose, with a breaking heart, and with contending feelings she seized a pen, and traced the following letter :

“ I am happy to inform you, my dear Mr. Foley, that the official patronage, which you have long wished me to procure for you, is now actually obtained, and your arrival in town is all that is wanted to arrange the necessary preliminaries. A letter received yesterday informs me of this; but in the interim, I wish you could make it convenient to pass a few days here on your road to London; for between ourselves, this place and its society is insufferably dull; and were it not for tilt and tournament between Lord Tonnerre and Lady Tilney (who you know under the rose cannot bear each other,) we must have all gone to sleep, or torn one another to pieces, or eaten our own paws, like antediluvian hyenas, from the absolute want of mental nourishment. But in this predicament, resembling people reduced to starvation on a sea voyage, we cast lots to see who should first be sacrificed for the bene-

fit of the rest, and fortunately by the address of Lady Tilney, the lot was made to fall on Lord Tonnerre, who finished his existence amongst us, as he always lived, in a storm of passion; the only one of the party, I believe, who regrets his absence, is Lady Baskerville, who is now *sans cavalier*, and in the Roman phraseology, *d'impeccarsi*. I advise you then by all means to come quickly, and to supply the vacancy.

“ But to leave joking, I must tell you my dear friend, that I languish for a rational companion, and one who will kindly enter into my feelings; nobody understands me here;—too good, and too bad, I am like Mahomet’s tomb, hanging between heaven and earth, and I find no resting place for my sick soul, nor shall I, ’till you come with your kindly smile, to solace my weary spirit. Come, therefore, and that without delay, for you well know that when any thing is to be done, it had best be done quickly— all delays are dangerous, and with me they are despair.

“ Would you wish to know something of

those you will meet here? I have only to mention their names, and refer you to our old note book; I see no great visible change in any of them. Mr. Spencer Newcombe has been here for a few days, and is certainly the *most* diverting man in the world; and well he may be, for he lives entirely for that purpose.

“ Lord Albert D’Esterre is here also; he sets up for a censor and corrector of men, manners, and things. He will have enough to do, if he persists in this unpopular walk; but I am much mistaken, if he will not soon find it a very arduous undertaking, and one indeed which is quite hopeless. If he were but content to do as other people do, who live in the world, and to be a little more like his day and generation, and a little less of Don Quixotte, he would really be a pleasant person. He does not, *par parenthèse*, seem in a hurry to join his betrothed, which I think is rather a good sign; for I should have but a poor opinion of a man who did as papa and mamma ordered, and fell in love precisely as he had been desired to do in the days of his childhood.

“ The Tilney, the Leinsengen, the Baskerville, the Boileau, go on in their usual way; and like the old quotation, though they all differ, yet they all agree in one thing at least, which is wishing the society of your agreeable self; so under pain of not only my displeasure, but that of all the world’s, come quickly, and delay not. Adieu, and believe me to be the most true of your true friends.

“ H. V.”

In consequence of the occurrence of Lord Albert’s morning walk, he felt little inclined to join the circle on his return to Restormel; and was in a mood too replete with contradictory feelings, to allow him to reflect calmly, still less to enable him to decide sanely upon the only vigorous step he should have taken, namely, to flee from temptation. He excused himself under the plea of being unwell, from leaving his own room; and sitting down with a determination of communing with his own heart, he found not the habit so easy, after long neglect; and was conscious that he mused, without deriving any fruit from his contemplations.

But by degrees, this confusion of mind subsided; and then came that soothing composure, which, after a state of emotion, is always welcomed with something like pleasure. He opened a favourite author, Owen Feltham; and he could not read long, without seeing his own necessities reflected in the page, as in a glass; this is one way by which to prove whether a moral or religious work be sterling or not, does it apply to our necessities? does it first probe, and then salve our wounds? Lord Albert D'Esterre found this book did both; and in its perusal, there was a sanctity of enjoyment to which he had been long a stranger. This enjoyment was, however, too soon disturbed by his servant bringing in a note; he felt it as an unwelcome intrusion; but it was opened after a moment's hesitation, and contained the following words:

“ I am anxious to know how you really are. I too am unwell, and I dread lest I should have have said or done something this morning, which may have offended you—oh! if you know how terrible it is for those who have none to care for them, to suppose for an

instant that they have given pain (however, unwittingly) to the only person whose good opinion they are anxious to possess, and who has evinced an interest in their welfare—you would now feel for me. I am not of those who make a display of their heart's feelings—far from it, I am a miser of the few treasures which lie hoarded there; it is for that reason that I mingle with the rest, as though I were one of *them*; and that I am now writing these troubled lines in the midst of the insipid turmoil which surrounds me; *tout comme si de rien étoit*. Aid me in bearing my grievous burthen of existence, and send me one line to be a cordial for the moment at least; the present moment's ease is all I ever hope for."

What an overturn to all composure was conveyed in this little bit of perfumed paper; fifty commencements of reply were made and torn; at last he rang his bell, summoned his valet, and having given a verbal answer to the effect that he would shortly obey the commands of Lady Hamlet Vernon, he appeared in the drawing-room almost as soon as she

could have expected a written reply. She was sitting apart from the rest of the company with a look of abstractedness and melancholy, the effect of which was heightened by extreme paleness; her beautiful dark hair was less carefully arranged than the laws of fashion demanded, but it was not the less beautiful for that, and some stray tresses fell gracefully upon her neck; her air, her dress, the subdued expression of her eyes, were all captivating, and precisely in Lord Albert's *own* way.

There was a carelessness or scorn of *fashionable* dress, which particularly suited his theories on the subject, not that his practical admiration had not fifty times been excited by a very different mode of attire; for the fact is, that men's tastes in respect to the costume of women are always regulated by that of the person they are in love with. On this occasion, however, it is certain that Lady Hamlet's attire was in the letter and in the spirit precisely what Lord Albert D'Esterre pronounced perfect. She held out her hand to him as he entered the saloon with the composed air of

friendship, and expressed her pleasure at seeing him, for she had feared his indisposition would not have allowed him to leave his room : and then motioning him to sit down by her with that expression of calm interest, which attracts without affording any plausible application of the sentiment to a more vivid interest, she secured her object, and he occupied the vacant seat next to her's. Mr. Leslie Winyard, who was playing *écarté* (even on the sacred day) with Lady Boileau, while the rest were studying and betting on the game, called to Lord D'Esterre, " ah ! Lord Albert, we have all been guessing the reason of your absence ; one said writing letters of love, another sleeping ; but the successful guess was given to my penetrating judgment, writing a sermon on the vanities of human life, that is, holding up to censure all that we your friends are doing."

" I assure you, Mr. Leslie Winyard, that you have not proved your judgment infallible ; for I do not plead guilty either to *your* charge, or to any of the others."

“ Well, then, join in our game; Lady Boileau intends to beat me, and I’ll vacate my seat in your favour, and, in parliamentary phrase, accept at the same time as many hundreds as you may choose to give me.”

“ Pardon me,” said Lord Albert, “ I cannot.”

“ Did you suppose Lady Hamlet Vernon would let him do so?” whispered Lady Baskerville.

“ That may be,” replied Leslie Winyard, “ but my life for it that is not his reason, he will not play because it is Sunday.”

“ Sunday, is it?” yawned Lady Ellersby; “ dear me! I did not know it was Sunday.”

“ Leslie Winyard declares you will not play because it is Sunday, Lord Albert D’Esterre,” exclaimed Mr. Spencer Newcomb.

“ Whatever may be my motive, or my fancy for not playing,” replied Lord Albert, “ I conceive that it is at variance with the high good breeding of this circle to inquire further into the matter, though, if it will afford any satisfaction to Mr. Leslie Winyard, I have

not the smallest hesitation to give to him those motives."

"I am bounden to you, my Lord," rejoined the latter, putting his hand to his heart, "but for the moment waive the honour of hearing more, being at the very crisis of the game," and so saying he turned to the card-table, and left Lord D'Esterre to the undisturbed enjoyment of his conversation with Lady Hamlet Vernon.

She first broke silence (speaking in a low tone). "How many misnomers there are in the world; this society considers itself the mode and paragon of manners and of fashion—the world *par excellence*; and yet the members of it are always doing or saying something to offend the feelings of each other. Why was a being like myself thrown amongst them? one who sees their falsehood and folly, and yet cannot escape from it. But on the contrary, every day as it passes seems more and more to entangle me. I possess indeed one friend, from whom I look for consolation; but *he*, like every one in this world, has his own troubles, and

indeed I have sometimes feared, that is I fear” — she broke off abruptly as if to find a suitable expression for what she would say, then again continued after a pause — “that I did not altogether act a generous part by him; one may excite a deeper interest than one intends, for it is so soothing to a desolate heart, to find any one whom it can like, and rest upon, that it is easy to be betrayed into a conduct, that would afterwards perhaps render one obnoxious to the imputation of coquetry; the character for which of all others, I have the most decided contempt. I have not yet learnt from you, Lord Albert D’Esterre,” laying particular emphasis on her words, “that firm independence of mind, which never yields under circumstances; for whatever vain disputation I may hold with myself, I find I am continually yielding to the influence of events, and floating down the tide of life, guided more by impulse, than by principle. It will perhaps be as well in the end— who knows?”

Lord Albert D’Esterre had listened with evident pain to the sophistry these words

contained, and as Lady Hamlet Vernon paused, added in his most impressive manner :

“ Oh ! dear Lady Hamlet Vernon, I fear it will undoubtedly *not* be well with us in the end, if we live by chance ; and we may all know, if we chuse to know, that so to live will prove our condemnation.”

“ Persuade me of *that*, teach me your knowledge, and I will act upon it ; give me your conviction and I will bless you.”

“ Surely,” thought Lord Albert D’Esterre, “ it is my duty to reclaim this person from the unhappy and destructive errors into which she has fallen ; it would be altogether wrong, it would be barbarous, to abandon one, who calls upon me for aid, who appeals to *me* for instruction.” Not but another view of the subject crossed his mind, for thoughts, as we all know, flow in from contradictory sources.

“ Surely the friend to whom you allude, and on whom you say you rely, will be a far more able instructor than I can be.”

“ Ay, so he might (she replied) if”——“ If what ?” —— “ If I durst on all occasions apply

to him—but—but there are existing reasons to which I before alluded, and which I now frankly tell you, have frequently made me deny myself the consolation of his society. We shall see how things are now, when we are to meet again after a long absence.”

Lord Albert D’Esterre could scarcely misunderstand the meaning which these words implied, and he was too delicate to press the matter further; but when they separated for the night, the chief point which was impressed on Lord Albert’s mind was, that Lady Hamlet Vernon was beloved by Mr. Foley, and if she did not positively return that sentiment in its full degree, that she owned a preference in his favour, to which it was very nearly allied. Yet if it were so, why should that circumstance cause him uneasiness? It could only be from the interest he had imbibed for a person, who seemed intended for a higher and better career than the one she was pursuing.

Men, even the very best of men, frequently deceive themselves on similar occasions; they are not, perhaps, *in love*, they do not mean

to be so ; still less is it their intention deliberately to awaken an interest which they feel they cannot return : but though they are few, who would attempt to *win* a heart under these circumstances, and merely for the triumph of doing so ; *all* are not sufficiently free from vanity to *refuse* one, when spontaneously offered, nor, while its possession can be valued for the passing gratification of self-love *only*, voluntarily forego the distinction which its homage affords. That such was the predicament in which Lord Albert D'Esterre stood, or that such was the train of his thoughts, it would be difficult to say.

Lady Hamlet Vernon's conduct and manners towards himself certainly betrayed partiality, which it was impossible to avoid seeing ; but it was equally impossible to attach to them the decided character of love ; and even were it so, Lord Albert stood pledged to an engagement of the most sacred nature, and one which had it been intimated to him he could have abandoned, he would have started from

the contemplation of its possibility ; still, however, his mind was under delusion in regard to Lady Hamlet Vernon, and the interest which he would have persuaded himself was felt for her sake only, was, it is to be feared, nearly allied to a sentiment, which in his circumstances never should have been entertained.

If, however, Lord Albert D'Esterre was wandering in the maze of undefined resolution, and with an uncertainty of object, in all his speculations, not so Lady Hamlet Vernon, who well marked the nature of the interest she was gradually acquiring over him, and which she hoped soon to see augmented in a degree which would render him completely her own.

Many days did not elapse from this time before Mr. Foley arrived. With that refinement of tact which all women understand so well, Lady Hamlet Vernon made her first approach towards the object she had in view, by producing between Mr. Foley and Lord Albert D'Esterre a mutual partiality.

She effected this, as is often successfully done, by repeating favourable opinions respecting each, which were uttered, or were not uttered, as it chanced by the parties one of another; “*mais on ne s’avise jamais de tout,*” and there was one circumstance which operated against her wishes whilst cementing their intimacy. Thus was the influence which Mr. Foley’s vivid description and praises of the attractions of Lady Adeline Seymour produced on Lord Albert D’Esterre’s mind. Although somewhat diminished by absence and by the too great security he felt of conceiving her to be beyond the possibility of change, these attractions still retained their power, and it needed but the description which he more than once listened to of her beauty and her worth, as the theme was dwelt upon by Mr. Foley, to revive in him all the latent feelings of his love and admiration for her. After this revival of the natural allegiance of his heart, Lord Albert D’Esterre started from his wayward dream as though he had been warned by

his better angel. Shaking off the listless unaccountable thralldom which had of late palsied his resolution, he ordered post-horses, and determined to set off for Dunmelraise the very next day.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:

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Pastel

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